

# Ernesto

# Che

I. Lavretsky

# Guevara



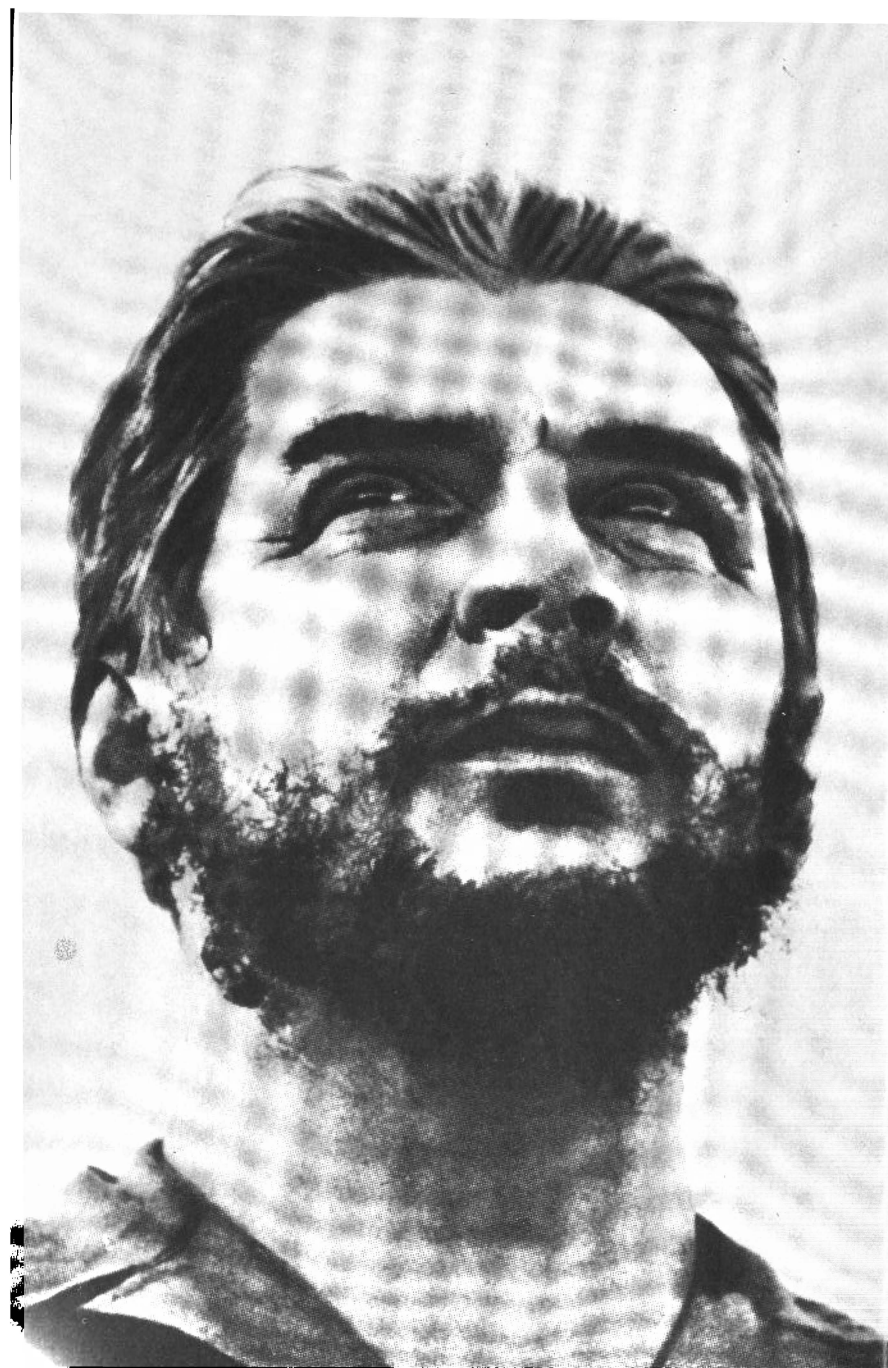
This book by I. R. Lavretsky, Dr. Sc. (Hist.), is concerned with the life and activities of the outstanding revolutionary and fighter for the national liberation of the Latin American peoples Ernesto Che Guevara.

The author makes use of numerous documents, press items, notes from personal conversations with friends, relatives and comrades-in-arms of Che Guevara, as well as a wealth of photographs.









I. Lavretsky

**Ernesto  
Che  
Guevara**



**PROGRESS PUBLISHERS**  
**Moscow**



Translated from the Russian by *A. B. Eklof*  
Designed by *V. An*

И. Лаврецкий  
Эрнесто Че Гсвара  
*На английском языке*

First printing 1976

© Translation into English. Progress Publishers 1976  
Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Л  $\frac{10302-628}{014(01)-76}$  49-76

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## **LANDMARKS IN THE LIFE OF ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA**

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# The Road to the “Granma”

## First Steps

**Question: Your nationality and origins?**

**Answer: “You know it, and so does everybody, that I was born in Argentina.”**

**(From an interview with Ernesto Che Guevara by a correspondent of the Mexican journal *Siempre*, September 1959.)**

On a February evening in 1969 we were sitting in Alberto Granados’ spacious living room in Miramar, a suburb of Havana. The company included Don Ernesto Guevara Lynch, Alberto and myself. Alberto’s Venezuelan wife, Julia, joined in from time to time. We talked of Che’s childhood and adolescence.

A tropical downpour released floods of water over the villa. Lightning flashed through the venetian blinds and thunder roared like a nearby cannonade. It made one feel cosy to be under shelter in such nasty weather—pity the fellow who was caught in the mountains or the *manigua* as the Cubans call their fields covered with prickly underbrush.

The tropics are often called melancholy but they are menacing as well. Life there is difficult and often dangerous. Earning a living in the tropics takes courage, stamina, iron will, resourcefulness and, of course, luck.

At the time of the meeting Che’s father was just under seventy years old. He was of average height and had an erect figure. His keen eyes shone through his tortoise-shell glasses. He spoke with the typical La Plata accent with which it is so easy to pick out an Argentine and, like all Argentines and Uruguayans, he made frequent use of the interjection “che”. Pundits argue that the Argentines borrowed this “che” from the Guaraní Indians for whom it means “my”. But for the residents of the pampas “che” can express, depending on intonation and context, the entire

spectrum of human passions—surprise, exhilaration, sorrow, tenderness, approval or protest.

It was because of fondness for this interjection that the Cuban rebels gave Don Ernesto's son, Ernesto Guevara, the nickname "Che". With time this nickname became his pseudonym in combat and was firmly attached to his name. He became known as Ernesto Che Guevara both in Cuba and throughout the world.

After the overthrow of Batista, Guevara, now the director of the Cuban National Bank, added the signature "Che" to the new banknotes and caused great indignation among the counter-revolutionaries.

When he was once asked, after the victory of the Cuban Revolution, whether he liked his new name, he answered: "For me 'Che' signifies all that is most important and valuable in my life. It couldn't be otherwise. After all, my first name and surname represent something small, private, insignificant."

Don Ernesto said to me: "In order to understand how my son became Major Che, one of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, and what led him into the Bolivian mountains, we have to look into the past and find out something about our family ancestors. The first thing to note is that in my son's veins flowed the blood of the Irish rebels, the Spanish conquistadores and the Argentinean patriots. Evidently Che inherited some of the features of our restless ancestors. There was something in his nature which drew him to distant wanderings, dangerous adventures and new ideas.

"I myself couldn't sit still in my youth. At first I had a *yerba mate*<sup>1</sup> plantation in the remote Argentinean province of Misiones on the border with Paraguay. Then I built houses in Córdoba, Buenos Aires and other cities. I set up construction firms and often burned my fingers. I never did manage to make a fortune. I couldn't make profit at other people's expense, so others made profit at mine. But I've got no regrets on that score, after all, it isn't money, but a clear conscience that's most important in life. Although my financial situation was never brilliant, all of my children—and there are five of them—received a higher education and made a success of themselves. But I am most proud, of course, of Ernesto. He was a true man, a real fighter."

We drank some hot coffee, real *tinto*, a strong brew prepared by Julia according to a Venezuelan recipe.

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<sup>1</sup> Paraguayan tea.

“Unfortunately I can’t offer you *mate*,” said Alberto. “Because of the damned blockade it’s not easy to get it from Argentina. But *into* isn’t a bad drink during foul weather, especially since there’s a bottle of Russian vodka added to Extra Seco on the table.”

Julia gave us a reproachful look: her husband had a liver ailment and the doctors had forbidden him to touch alcohol.

“I’m a sinner that likes a drink,” Alberto defended himself. “But as for Che, he didn’t like liquor. Early in life he developed a passion for aromatic anti-asthma cigarettes, and while in Cuba grew fond of ‘Tabaco’ brand cigars. He swore that they warded off asthma attacks. He really did know a good cigar and smoked incessantly.”

“So, young man,” Don Ernesto picked up his story once again, “as I already said, we have to delve into history. For you as an historian it will be all the more useful. When Batista was overthrown and Che became a celebrity, the newspapers began to print all kinds of fables about him. Some journalists even expressed the doubt that he was an Argentine. There were even those who argued that he was a Russian pretending to be an Argentine. But we are Argentines, in fact the kind of natives of whom there aren’t many in our country populated primarily by people of European origin. On my side Che is a twelfth-generation Argentine, on the side of his mother—eighth. You know, you’d have a hard time finding an older Argentine family than ours.

“I’ll begin with our ancestors. According to Spanish custom we have two surnames. I am Guevara after my father and Lynch after my mother. The Spanish ancestors of my father came to Argentina during the colonial era.<sup>1</sup> They settled in the province of Mendoza bordering on Chile, and there took up agriculture. As I’m sure you know Mendoza was, at the outset of the last century, the base for the army of our liberator—General José de San

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<sup>1</sup> Che himself attached no importance to his descent, and if he made mention of it, then only in jest. In 1964, in reply to a letter from a certain Señora María Rosario Guevara from Casablanca asking of his origins, Che wrote “Comrade! To put it bluntly, I don’t know what part of Spain my ancestors come from. It was so long ago that they took leave of our ‘ancestral home’ dressed in their ‘birthday suits’. And I don’t go around in the same manner simply because it’s not especially comfortable. I don’t think that we’re close relatives, but if you are capable of trembling with indignation every time an injustice is committed in this world, then we are comrades—and that is more important.”



Martín. It was under his leadership that the Spanish yoke was thrown off in Argentina. San Martín's army then travelled from Mendoza to Chile, where they also drove out the Spaniards, then they liberated Lima, capital of the viceroyalty of Peru. At that time civil war broke out in Argentina. San Martín was forced to retire. Colombian troops under the command of Simón Bolívar and Grand Marshal Sucre completed the liberation of Peru.

"The civil war in Argentina ended in 1829 with the seizure of power in Buenos Aires by General Juan Manuel de Rosas, a protégé of the rich cattle ranchers of that city. He was pitiless in eliminating his rivals, wiping out entire families and seizing their property. He remained in power a long 23 years.

"In 1840 my paternal grandfather, Juan Antonio, and his brother José Gabriel Guevara, fled from Mendoza to Valparaíso to escape persecution by Rosas. The latter confiscated their land. The brothers were accompanied in their flight to Chile by their neighbour Lieutenant Francisco Lynch, whose father, Colonel Lynch y Arandía had been killed by order of the tyrant. The Lynch land was also seized by Rosas.

"The founder of the Argentine branch of the Lynches was the Irishman Patrick, or as we call him Patricio, a participant in the struggle against English dominance. Patricio had done much to irritate the English and they set out in pursuit of him. He fled to Spain and from there to Argentina, or as it was then called, Gobernación Río de la Plata. There he married a rich Creole, the heiress of a large cattle estate in Mendoza. This all took place in the second half of the eighteenth century, during Spanish domination.

"Take note, young man, that Francisco Lynch was my maternal grandfather. So what happened next? Francisco Lynch travelled all over Chile in search of work and even made it to the Strait of Magellan, at the very edge of our continent. Then he was drawn into neighbouring Peru when he fell ill with cholera. From Peru he set out for Ecuador—where he caught smallpox. From Ecuador he returned to Valparaíso where once again he met up with the Guevara brothers.

"At that time there were many Argentinean exiles—opponents of Rosas—in Valparaíso. Among them were the writers Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre, who later became presidents of Argentina. There was Juan Bautista Alberdi, one of our country's outstanding democrats, a follower of the French

Utopians and advocate of their ideas. These men exposed Rosas' crimes in the local press and conspired against him. But at that time Rosas was firmly established in the presidential mansion, and attempts to overthrow him ended with the deaths of those who were involved.

"So once, early in 1848, when Lynch and the Guevara brothers were sitting with Sarmiento in a Valparaíso café and discussing the latest news from Argentina, a compatriot, José Carreas, ran up with the sensational news that fabulous gold mines had been discovered in California. Carreas suggested that they bolt in that direction. Possession of the "accursed metal" would allow them to arm the patriots and overthrow Rosas.

"The suggestion received a mixed reaction among the café's habitués. 'You won't make it to California in time,' said Sarmiento. 'By the time you get there the veins will have dried up and you'll have to return to Valparaíso with nothing for your pains.'

"But youth is gullible and unreasoning, and the advice of the older generation doesn't count for much. Francisco Lynch and the Guevara brothers were struck with the 'gold fever' and were ready to set out for California without further ado.

"It was only a few weeks later that the would-be millionaires set out on a two-masted brigantine in the direction of San Francisco where they arrived without incident in the winter of 1848. By the way, there were many Chileans heading in the same direction. Their adventures in this foreign land were described by Pablo Neruda in his dramatic cantata 'The Life and Death of Joaquín Murieta'.

"San Francisco was an indescribable scene at the time. The city was packed with gold seekers of all countries, races and nationalities. It was some time before our seafarers could sell their brigantine and head off in the direction of the fabled Sacramento Valley, where, they were sure, boundless wealth awaited them. But not all of them made it out of the city. Lynch got bogged down in San Francisco, where he met Eloísa Ortíz, a young Chilean woman, the widow of an English sailor. Lynch fell in love and married her. Should he leave his young wife in San Francisco and set out on the search? Or should he take her with him? Both options seemed equally risky. Lynch, a true *caballero*, decided to remain in San Francisco and try his fortune there. He opened a saloon in the city and christened it the *Placeres de California* ("Pleasures of

California"). This saloon turned out to be a gold mine of its own. Lynch raked in the money....

"Lynch and Eloísa Ortiz became the parents of a daughter—Ana—while in California. Note that this Ana Lynch Ortiz was my mother, Che's grandmother."

"But what happened to the Guevara brothers?"

"Oh, that was a true Odyssey! Juan Antonio and José Gabriel had no luck. You know, it's in the stars, we weren't fated to be millionaires. The plot they worked in the Sacramento Valley turned out to be empty. They scoured every inch of the soil, panned tons of earth and all in vain—there was no more gold there than at the bottom of this goblet. But every cloud has a silver lining. Our prospectors returned to San Francisco totally exhausted and in mean spirits. Lynch put them up and gave them work in the saloon. There they made the acquaintance of a local aristocrat, Don Guillermo de Castro. His wife's grandfather, the Spanish grandee Gastón de Peralta, had been Viceroy of New Spain (present-day Mexico) from which the Yankees seized California. Don Guillermo de Castro owned numerous estates. He even owned the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

"Young man, don't think that I'm giving you a lot of useless detail that has nothing to do with the question that interests you. Quite the contrary. You'll see that Guillermo de Castro and his *señora*, the granddaughter of Viceroy Peralta, are directly connected with yours truly, and thus with Che. Don Guillermo took a liking to the Guevara brothers and appointed them managers of his San Lorenzo cattle ranch near the present city of San Diego. It wasn't a mistake, for my relatives knew the business well. Neither did the Guevara brothers lose out in accepting the offer, and my grandfather Juan Antonio did especially well, for it was precisely there, on the San Lorenzo ranch, that true happiness waited for him. It was there that he met Don Guillermo's only daughter—Concepción. They fell in love, and where there's love marriage follows—at least that was how it was in those good old times. Don Guillermo was overjoyed to give his daughter to an Argentine of Spanish blood. As for my grandfather, the marriage made him the inheritor of all of Don Guillermo de Castro's properties, including the Grand Canyon. I'll point out right now that all of this land and the Grand Canyon were then deceitfully annexed by the American authorities. Our family waged a long battle in court. The matter went to the Supreme Court which took



the side of the authorities, and we were left with nothing but court expenses, which added up to what was at that time a fabulous sum. However, we won't make a point of complaining on that score. After all, if they had returned the land to us, who knows, maybe our family's destiny would have been altered and instead of producing the heroic figure of Major Che, who gave his life for the freedom of America, we would have turned out just one more rich and idle loungeer to litter the landscape.

"I suppose you have already figured out that my grandparents Juan Antonio and Concepción gave birth to a son. You're quite right. He was born in the United States and given the name Roberto. This was my father. Just like my mother he was born a citizen of the United States of America. The surprises that history drops in our laps! But in order for me to make my appearance, my father Roberto Guevara, son of Juan Antonio and Concepción de Castro, had to marry my mother Ana Lynch, the daughter of Francisco Lynch and Eloísa Ortíz. That took place 26 years later under the following circumstances.

"We have a saying in Argentina that to each swine his hour will come. Well, the hour came for Rosas as well. In 1852 General Justo José de Urquiza, the governor of the province of Entre Ríos, revolted against him. The entire nation joined in the revolt, Rosas was overthrown and the winds of freedom again swept over Argentina. When the good news reached San Francisco, nothing could restrain my grandfather and his brother from returning home as quickly as possible. He, like a genuine Spanish *hidalgo*, understood that a man's first duty was to serve his country.

"It took a few days to set their affairs straight. The ship got them from San Francisco to Valparaíso in good time, and making their way across the Andes they arrived in their native Mendoza. Of course, the new government soon gave back the Guevara brothers the land Rosas had taken away. Finally their lives returned to normal.

"You might ask what happened to Francisco Lynch, the owner of the *Placeres de California*. Well, Lynch remained where he was for another quarter of a century. Why? Who could give the reasons now? Perhaps he was reluctant to give up his saloon. Or maybe the very size of his family kept him from moving. In fact, Doña Eloísa, his wife, gave birth to no less than 17 children. But California is California and not the motherland. And although all of Don Francisco Lynch's children were born in the United

States, the former lieutenant in the Argentine Army in the end couldn't resist the pull drawing him to his native pampas. In the '70s he sold the saloon and took his entire clan to the ancestral land, to Mendoza, where once again he settled on the family hacienda adjacent to his friends, the Guevara brothers.

"It's not hard to imagine the joy with which my grandfathers greeted the Lynches. My father Roberto was then 26 years old, and Lynch's eldest daughter Ana a year older—and still single. It was as if both had lived in anticipation of this meeting. They married and soon spawned 11 children. The sixth was yours truly, Ernesto Guevara Lynch.

"My father, Roberto Guevara, was a land surveyor by profession. He held a fairly high post in the government as head of the State Commission for rectifying the boundaries with Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. He was constantly on the road, engaged in negotiations with our neighbours. It's worth pointing out that the present-day boundaries of Argentina were established to no small measure through his direct efforts.

"Now, young man, a few words about myself. I studied in the architectural department of the National University at Buenos Aires, but with interruptions, for I had to work. All that was left of the estates of my grandfather were memories. He had many children besides my father, and my parents, as you know, had 11 children. So you see that we couldn't make a living on rent, which was good, for none of us became parasites."

"Don Ernesto, tell me please, the eminent Argentine writer Benito Lynch, the author of *Vultures of Florida* which, by the way, has been translated into Russian—is he your relative?"

"Benito is the grandson of Don Francisco Lynch, my cousin. The number of relatives is really staggering, and they come in all types—rich, comfortably off, smart and stupid, famous and unknown, revolutionary and reactionary. One of my cousins, Admiral Lynch, was the Argentinean Ambassador to Cuba not long before my son arrived there. There is even a German branch of the Lynch family. One of my aunts—a daughter of Don Francisco—married her German music teacher and so 'spoiled' our lineage. The offspring of this marriage became followers of the maniac Hitler. As for me, throughout my entire life I have been a staunch enemy of nazism and fascism. The same was true of my wife and all my children. Back in the thirties my family took part in the Argentinean movement against fascism and anti-semitism

and in the movement to aid Republican Spain. During World War II we participated in the movement of solidarity with the Allies, in particular with De Gaulle's *France Libre*, which then evoked our warmest sympathies.

"My wife, Celia de la Serna y de la Llosa, whom I married in 1927, like me belonged to an old Argentine family. We were even distantly related.

"Celia's uncle, Juan de la Serna, was married to my aunt, one of Don Francisco Lynch's daughters. Celia's father, the lawyer Juan Martín de la Serna, made Argentinean history as the founder of the city Avellaneda near Buenos Aires. Today Avellaneda is a major industrial centre, the location of our renowned *frigoríficos*—meat-packing houses. The word "ours" must be qualified, for they are owned by Swift, Armour and other British and American companies. I'm sure, however, that sooner or later these *frigoríficos* will come under the ownership of the Argentine people, to whom they rightfully belong.

"It should be noted that my wife's family also includes its Spanish grandee in the past. Don't think that either she or I consider it of any particular importance, but a fact is a fact."

"There is a Russian proverb, Don Ernesto, to the effect that you can't leave out a word from a song."

"Exactly. Anyway I was thinking of General José de la Serna e Hinojosa, the last Spanish Viceroy of Peru. It was his troops which were smashed by Marshal Sucre of Great Colombia at the memorable battle near Ayacucho."

"Don Ernesto, Marx and Engels mention José de la Serna in an article entitled 'Ayacucho',<sup>1</sup> in which they provide details of this historic battle, marking the culmination of the fifteen-year war for the independence of Latin America."

"That's the first time I've heard of it, although it doesn't come as a surprise, for Marx and Engels were universal scholars and maintained a lively interest in the events about them. The Battle of Ayacucho which gave the decisive boost to the struggle for independence waged by our patriots could not avoid attracting their attention.

"Let's return, however, to my wife Celia. She was a free spirit and took no account of the conventions of our aristocratic caste.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, "Ayacucho", Werke, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1969, p. 168.

She was interested in politics and gave her own, bold and original judgements on all questions—all this despite the fact that she had been brought up in a closed Catholic college. On second thought, maybe it was because of this: after all Voltaire and Fidel Castro were also brought up by Jesuits, and look what became of each! As far as religion was concerned, Celia and I were in complete agreement. Neither we nor our children went to church. In her youth Celia took part in the feminist movement and fought for women's suffrage. She was one of the first Argentine women to drive an automobile and even dared, in violation of the law, to ride along Florida Street, which was closed for all but pedestrians. She was one of the first to cut her braids and to sign her own name to bank checks. In those years her behaviour disturbed the aristocrats, she was looked upon as an extravagant and eccentric woman. But those aspects which shocked others pleased me—I have in mind her intelligence, her independent and free nature.

"How did we begin our life together? Celia inherited a *yerba mate* plantation in Misiones and we moved there, wanting to turn it into a model economy. Prices on *yerba mate* were high at the time, and the tea was even called "green gold". I bought the most modern machinery and tried to improve the conditions of the seasonal workers who harvested the crop.

"The Argentines are very fond of *mate*. They drink it as other nations drink coffee or tea. My son was also a great lover of *mate*. Our poet Fernán Silva Valdés speaks of this pleasant and healthful drink:

*You possess the gift of rugged vigour,  
The vital force that flows from palms of manhood—  
acrid mate.*

*Whether I'm content or steeped in sadness  
On every side. I sense your presence near me....  
One drop I drink will banish from my heart all melancholic  
thought,*

*Expelling sadness so joy may take its place,  
Then in my house misfortunes soon are ended.*

"*Mate* brings on happiness, satisfaction. But to those who work with the leaves *mate* causes boundless suffering.

"The workers on *yerba mate* plantations were in the situation of outcasts, forced labourers and the bosses held sway over their lives, could beat and even kill them with impunity. They worked

for peanuts, or even worse, for coupons with which they could buy inferior quality goods and produce at inflated prices in the company store. To make matters worse, the stores kept unlimited supplies of alcohol on hand. Any organised resistance on the part of the workers was cruelly suppressed by the plantation owners and the police.

“The first thing I did was to eliminate the coupons and begin to pay the workers a straight money salary. I also prohibited the sale of alcohol on the plantation. And I immediately won the hostility of the neighbouring planters. At first they thought I was insane, then, convinced that I was in my right mind, began to label me a Communist. In my political inclinations at the time I was a radical, a supporter of the Radical Civil Alliance. This was a democratic party, headed by President Hipólito Yrigoyen, who while in power did much of benefit for the country. He advocated an independent foreign policy and observed the Constitution. The plantation owners threatened to take reprisals against me. At that time there was no law in Misiones. The local authorities and police were in the pockets of the planters. I’m no coward but I didn’t think I had the right to risk Celia’s life. I decided to move to Rosario, Argentina’s second largest city, and there open up a Paraguayan tea factory. It was here that Che was born on June 14, 1928—a month prematurely, and Celia named him Ernesto in my honour. At home we called him Tete.

“My plans to open a factory in Rosario fell through as well. It was just at that time that the world economic crisis erupted. Argentina’s economy, dependent upon New York and London, suffered heavily from the crisis. Foreign trade was reduced, the prices on our raw materials fell catastrophically on the world market, many firms went bankrupt and unemployment spread. I couldn’t get the credit on which I had been counting. I was forced to abandon my plans to become a factory owner and to return to the plantation in Misiones.

On May 2, 1930—I remember the date so well—Celia and I set out with Tete for a dip in the swimming pool. Celia was a strong swimmer and loved the water. The day turned out to be chilly and a brisk cold wind blew. Suddenly Tete began to cough and wheeze. We took him straight to a doctor, who determined that the child had asthma. Perhaps he had caught a cold, or it could be that he inherited the disease, for Celia as a child had also been afflicted with it.

“At that time medicine was powerless against asthma. Today doctors say that it is caused by allergies. But then even that fact was unknown. All that they could advise us was a change of climate. We chose Córdoba, the healthiest of our provinces, for it is located in an alpine region. The clear, transparent air, laced with the fragrance of the coniferous forests is regarded as quite salubrious. We sold our plantation without any regrets and bought a home called Villa Nidia in the little spot Alta Gracia located near Córdoba two thousand metres above sea level. I began to work as a contractor building houses while Celia cared for the ailing Tete.

“From that unfortunate May 2, 1930 Tete suffered almost daily, or rather nightly, attacks of asthma. I slept next to his bed and when he began to wheeze took him in my arms, rocked and soothed him until the attack had passed and the exhausted child had fallen asleep, often only just before dawn.

“Tete was followed by four other children—Celia (in honour of my wife), Roberto (in honour of my father), Ana María (in honour of my mother) and Juan Martín (in honour of my wife’s father). All were given a higher education. The daughters became architects, Roberto a lawyer and Juan Martín a designer. They all had normal childhood and presented no particular difficulties.

“With Tete things were different. He couldn’t even enroll in school. For two years Celia taught him at home. To be sure, he did begin reading at the age of 4 and from that time on until the end of his life he was an avid reader. I was told that even when fighting in Bolivia, pursued by the enemy and suffering from asthma, he still managed to do some reading.

“What did he read? How can I express it ... he read everything. Both Celia and I were also book lovers and we had a large library adding up to several thousand volumes. This library was the highlight of our home and represented our most important possession. There were classics ranging from Spanish to Russian, there were books on history, philosophy, psychology and art. We had the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and books by Kropotkin and Bakunin. The Argentine contingent was represented by José Hernández, Sarmiento and others. There were books in French, which Celia spoke and taught Che.

“Of course, like all of us Che had his favourite authors. In childhood he preferred Salgari, Jules Verne, Dumas, Victor Hugo, Jack London. Later he took to Cervantes and Anatole

France. He read Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Gorky. Of course he read through all the Latin American social novels which were in vogue then, the Peruvian *Ciro Alegría*, the Ecuadorian *Jorge Icaza* and the Colombian *José Eustásio Rivera*, who described the difficult life of the Indians and the slave labour of the workers on the estates and plantations.

"From childhood on Che loved poetry; he knew well the works of Baudelaire, Verlaine, García Lorca, Antonio Machado and he loved Pablo Neruda's verse. He knew many poems by heart and had tried his own hand at writing verse. But, need I add, my son didn't consider himself a poet. He once called himself a revolutionary who never became a poet. In a letter to the poet and Spanish Republican Leon Felipe, whose book of verse, *Reindeer*, Che always had at his bedside, Ernesto called himself an "unsuccessful poet". The Cuban poet Roberto Fernández Retamar tells how, not long before Che left Cuba for the last time, he borrowed from Roberto an anthology of Spanish verse from which he copied down Neruda's poem "Farewell!"

"My son never parted with poetry until the bitter end. As you may know the contents of his back pack were found to include not only the famous *Bolivian Diary* but also a notebook with his favourite poems. Ernesto was also fond of painting, had a good grasp of art history, and wasn't bad with water-colours."

"I was told," I interrupted Don Ernesto, "that Che didn't like modernist painting. Once when visiting a modernist exhibit in some European country he told the journalists that he had nothing to say about modernist painting for he simply didn't understand it. He allowed that there could be some sense to it, but it escaped him."

"My son loved the Impressionists above all. By the way, he was also a chess enthusiast. After the victory of the Cuban Revolution he took part in tourneys and competitions. When he would call home and tell his wife that he was off to an appointment she knew that he was going to play chess with his friends.

"But one thing he had no understanding of was music. He was tone deaf, and couldn't distinguish a tango from a waltz. He couldn't dance, which is a rarity for an Argentine. After all, we each fancy ourselves to be outstanding dancers, even if it isn't the case."

"I was told, Don Ernesto, that when Che was Minister of Industry and he was asked to give his opinion on the quality of

new records he answered that he couldn't give any opinion on that score since his ignorance about music was complete."

"That sounds like him. He was never afraid to own up to his shortcomings. He loved to poke fun at others, but he didn't spare himself either. He was very self-critical, I would even say merciless about himself. Some people took this as a sign of forced originality, eccentricity, self-display. The actual reason was deeper and more serious, for this behaviour was caused by his extreme candour and his unbending hostility to lies and conventions, to petty-bourgeois morality. But honesty always surprises the philistine. Such a philistine looks at anything different as insanity or clever deceit, as affectation or ruse. Certain of Che's biographers have tried to explain this behaviour, strange to them, by reference to Freudian complexes, and ascribe to his asthma almost the decisive role in the formation of his character and revolutionary views. Well, it's all a bunch of nonsense.

"Revolutionaries are spawned not by disease or by physical handicap and not by some kind of emotional inclinations, but by an exploitative social system and by man's natural striving for justice.

"Tete's inclinations were not confined to such elevated subjects as poetry and art. Not at all. He was quite a whiz in mathematics and other exact sciences as well. We even thought that he would eventually become an engineer, but he chose to become a doctor. Probably this was prompted by his own illness or by the disease which struck his maternal grandmother with whom he shared a warm love. She died of cancer, which also took Celia away ... but here I'm getting ahead of myself.

"At a very early age we began to encourage Tete, in fact all of the children, to engage in various sports. Tete loved sports and gave his all just as he did for whatever he took up, paying no heed to his illness. It was as if he were trying to show that he was capable, despite his damned asthma, of not only matching but surpassing his peers. As a schoolboy he joined the local sports club *Atalaya* and played in the second string of the local football team. He was an outstanding player, but he couldn't remain on the first string because he was susceptible to asthma attacks during playing time and would be forced to leave the field and rush to his inhaler. He played rugby, a game for the strong and tough and involving a lot of body contact. He also did some horseback riding, played golf and even did some gliding, but the



real passion of his childhood and adolescence was unquestionably bicycling. He once wrote on a photograph which he gave to his fiancée Chinchina (María del Carmen Ferreyra): 'To Chinchina's suitors from the King of the Pedal.' "

"If I'm not mistaken, Don Ernesto, your son's name first made the papers in connection with a bicycling event?"

I dug into my papers and found an announcement from the Argentine journal *El Gráfico* dated May 5, 1950. I read aloud to Che's father:

"February 23, 1950. Señores, representatives of the Micrón Moped Firm. I am sending you a Micrón moped for a going over. I travelled 4 thousand kilometres through 12 Argentine provinces on it. This moped worked without a hitch for the entire trip, and I couldn't find a single thing wrong with it. I do count on having it returned in the same conditions." Signed: "Ernesto Guevara Serna".

"Tete made that trip when he was already enrolled as a student. The Micrón company provided him with one of its mopeds as an advertising gimmick and paid for some of his expenses during the trip.

"Che certainly never was a homebody. While a student he signed up as a sailor on an Argentine freighter and spent some time travelling, among other places, to Trinidad and British Guiana. Then he travelled, or to be more accurate, hiked across half of South America with Granados."

"Were you never nervous when Tete took up such risky undertakings, especially in light of his health?"

"Of course, Celia and I were always upset, and tormented ourselves over such happenings. But we kept our fear to ourselves. We had inculcated independence in our children and were firmly convinced that this would help them in the future. What's more it would have been impossible to keep them from doing such crazy acts, for youth is youth. I recall how Tete and Roberto once disappeared from the house. Tete was then eleven and Roberto eight years old. It was as if they had just vanished in thin air. We thought that they had lost their way in the woods nearby and looked for them there, then notified the police. A few days later they were found 800 kilometres from Córdoba. They'd sneaked into the back of a truck and taken a free ride there! But all of our trepidations connected with Tete's youthful escapades were just drops in the bucket compared with what awaited us in the future.

We were anxious and heavy of heart when we received a letter from him and Granados describing leper colonies they had stayed at during their travels through South America. Once he wrote us from Peru that he was setting out with Alberto on the Amazon on a raft given them by lepers—into the very wilds. He added the warning: 'If you don't hear from me in a month it means that we've been eaten by crocodiles or served up to the Jibaro Indians, who will shrink our heads and sell them to American tourists. In that case look for our debauched heads in the souvenir shops of New York.' Of course, we knew our son well and were aware that he was sending us a bit of his black humour, for he was self-confident and assured that all would turn out for the best. But still.... After all, the next letter came not one but two months later!

"Later ... when he wrote us from Mexico that he had joined up with Fidel Castro and was headed for Cuba to fight against Batista I didn't have the courage, frankly speaking, to read his letter through to the end. To spare my nerves Celia gave me a brief summary of it. And then two years passed without news of him, unless you include the accounts by the Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti, who spent April and May 1958 in the Sierra Maestra and brought back with him taped conversations with Che and Fidel. Masetti published a book on these meetings, *Those Who Fight and Those Who Weep*. The newspapers, however, carried several accounts of the defeat of the insurgents by Batista's troops, and every such account brought fresh anxiety about our son's fate.

"On December 31, 1958, the night before the fall of the Batista regime, our entire family met to celebrate the New Year. Our mood wasn't very buoyant, for the radio broadcast contradictory stories on events in Cuba, and concerning Che we only knew that he had been wounded in the battle for the city of Santa Clara. In Buenos Aires there was a Committee for Solidarity with the Cuban People which even maintained radio contact with Fidel's headquarters. But this contact was unreliable and often was cut off. So we didn't know what was really happening in Cuba.

"On that New Year's Eve when we had all gathered and expected no other guests, there was a knock on the door at about 11 p. m. We opened the door and found a letter there—to this day we don't know who delivered it. We read the following note: 'Dear Parents. I am in excellent health. I have spent two and five remain. I am continuing to work. The news is scarce and so it will

be from now on. But let's hope that God was an Argentine. My warmest embraces to you all. Tete.' He always said that he had seven lives like a cat. So when he said that he had spent two he meant that he had been twice wounded, and that he had five lives left.

"We were astounded and overjoyed with the unexpected message. But this wasn't to be the only surprise during that memorable night. Not even ten minutes had passed when we were left with another envelope. In it was a postcard with a drawing of a red rose and the words: "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Tete feels grand!" On the next day, January 1, 1959, Masetti and Alberto Granados visited us with the news of Batista's flight from Cuba. A week later, on January 7, when Havana had already been liberated by the insurgent army, Camilo Cienfuegos, having set up a pleasant surprise for Che, sent a plane for us from Havana. I was taken ill from all these upheavals, and Celia flew to Havana alone. When she embraced her son at the airport she couldn't hold back the tears. This was the first time she had given in.

"A month later I flew to Havana as well. Che met me at the boarding platform. I asked him if he was now considering dedicating himself to medicine. He answered: 'I can give you my title of doctor as a souvenir. As far as my plans are concerned, well, I think I'll stay here or continue the struggle in other areas...'

"As you know, another area for him was Bolivia. Our family was unaware that he was fighting there although the papers wrote about it. Early in January 1967 we got a letter from Tete which had been posted in Argentina. The letter was addressed to me, but congratulated my sister Beatriz, Che's favourite aunt, on the occasion of her birthday. I can read you the letter:

" 'Don Ernesto:

" 'Through the dust kicked up by the hooves of Rocinante, with my spear poised to hurl at the enemy giants who are pursuing me, I hurry to send you this almost telepathic message and pass on a ritual New Year greeting and a hug for you all. May the señorita, your sister, greet her fifteenth year surrounded by the love of her relatives and may she recall for a moment her absent and sentimental cavalier, who would like to see you all around sooner than was the case the last time. Such are my specific wishes which I entrusted to a passing star that met me during my travels according to the wishes of the Magic King!

" 'See you soon. And if I see you no more....

" 'Your son. D.'

"The two concluding lines were written in Italian. The letter was composed in Che's normal mockingly dramatic, 'conspirative' style. It was Beatriz's eightieth, not her fifteenth birthday. As far as can be determined the letter had been sent through Tania, who maintained the link between Che's unit and the outside world. These were the last words from my son...."

"What about Che's studies, was he a good student?"

"He was very gifted, talented, but no honours student. I already said that his first years in school were made up at home. Then he began to attend secondary school in Alta Gracia, but because of his health he was frequently absent. In 1941, when he was thirteen, he enrolled in the Dean Funes State College (named after a priest who participated in the independence movement) in Córdoba, where Celia drove him every day in a beat-up old car. Four years later, in 1945, Tete finished college. That same year we moved to Buenos Aires, where Tete enrolled in the medical department of the local university."

"I'm afraid I've worn you out with my persistent questions, Don Ernesto, but I have one more point of some importance to me. What factors and events influenced the young Che's political development? Did he take part in political movements during his student years? What opinions did he express in this area?"

"A lot of journalists have confronted me with that type of question, and ignorant hack writers have pumped out reams of pure fantasy on the subject, as they have on everything connected with Che. As for his political views, I can tell you the following about his sympathies and antipathies when he lived under his father's roof. Celia and I were, as far as domestic policies were concerned, in fundamental opposition to the oligarchic and military rulers who followed in quick succession ever since Hipólito Yrigoyen was overthrown in 1930 and the first Argentine "gorilla" came to power—General Uriburu, who promised to save the country from communism. Uriburu was replaced by Justo, after whom the country was ruled for a protracted interval by two oligarchs, the pro-British Ortiz and the pro-German Castillo. The latter was overthrown in 1941 by a triumvirate composed of "gorillas" in military uniform—Rawson, Farrell and Ramírez, who in turn were succeeded by Colonel Perón. In 1956 Perón was deposed by a junta of generals and admirals headed by Lonardi and Aram-

buru. There's no point in going any further in time, for Tete left Argentina in 1953, as it turned out, forever.

"Major foreign events flow together with internal developments to affect the life of Argentina. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, our economy is tightly bound to London City and New York's Wall Street, and everything that happens in Britain and the USA both interests and disturbs us. Second, a substantial number of Argentines are immigrants or the children of immigrants—primarily from Italy and Spain. We have a large German colony, many Jews, Poles, Syrians and English. It's only natural that these national contingents respond with passion and energy to developments in the country where they or their parents were born. Third, our intelligentsia, and particularly those in the arts, have always been pulled towards France. Paris was the mecca for our intellectuals, writers, actors and painters. So we've always been sensitive to France's destinies.

"On the other hand, events in the Soviet Union also interest us. We have our own very active Communist Party of Argentina. In general, socialist ideas are rather widespread in Argentina. A Socialist Workers' Party was founded in our country back at the close of the last century, and its founder, Juan B. Justo, was the first to translate Marx's *Das Kapital* into Spanish. Argentina has long published numerous books on socialism and Marxism, many of which I have in my own collection. But not all who write about communism and the Soviet Union are friends. There are also the enemies who, with their diametrically opposed stances, pile up one slander after another, and invent every imaginable fantasy. Then they were helped by Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, and today, as you know, the dirty work is carried on by the Yankees. A consequence is that the Argentine newspapers cover foreign events very thoroughly, I'd even say more so than they do internal events. All this helped Tete follow the most important developments taking place in the world.

"I tried to give my children an all-round education. Our home was always open for their peers, who included children of both the rich and the poor families of Córdoba and children of Communists, too. Tete, for instance, made friends with Negrita, the daughter of the poet Cayetano Córdoba Iturburu, who held communist views and was married to Celia's sister."

"Don Ernesto, I happened to fight in Spain in the International Brigades. While in Madrid early in 1937 my friend, the poet

Rafael Alberti, introduced me to Córdoba Iturburu, who had also arrived to help the Spanish Republic.”

“It really is a small world. Your mention of Spain was appropriate as well. The Spanish Civil War caused a big stir in Argentina. We had a Committee to Aid Republican Spain, in which Celia and I made a big effort to help. All of my children were avid supporters of the Republicans. We were neighbours and very close friends of Doctor Juan González Aguilar, Negrín’s Deputy Prime Minister in the government of the Spanish Republic. He emigrated to Argentina after the defeat of the Republic and settled in Alta Gracia. My children became friends with the González children, were classmates in school and then studied in the same college in Córdoba, where Celia drove them and Tete every day. Tete also made friends with the son of the Spaniard Fernando Barral, who had died fighting against the fascists. I also recall the renowned Republican General Jurado, who once stayed at the González’ home. Jurado often visited us and told of the Civil War, of the brutalities of Francoists and their German and Italian allies. All of this had its influence in shaping Tete’s future political views.

“Then the Second World War broke out and, of course, our entire family and all our friends were firm supporters of the Allies, of Russia, and we fervently hoped for the defeat of the Axis and were overjoyed with the victories of the Red Army. We were immensely impressed by the Battle of Stalingrad where the German Wehrmacht suffered a crushing defeat. Perón, then ruling Argentina, despite Allied pressure maintained diplomatic relations with the Axis countries. Argentina was flooded with Axis agents and spies who had secret radio stations at their disposal. The authorities not only didn’t object to or interfere with their subversive activity, but concealed and even aided it in every way possible. We, as friends of the Allies, helped search out and expose fascist agents. I took part in such operations; Tete knew about this and constantly asked me to take him on as a helper.

“Celia and I were among Perón’s active opponents. Celia was even arrested when during a demonstration in Córdoba she began to shout out anti-government slogans. In 1962 she was again detained by the police for participating in an anti-government demonstration. A year later she was arrested a third time upon returning from Cuba and was held in prison for several weeks.

“During Perón’s rule in Argentina there were a number of underground fighting organisations. I took part in one of the organisations active in Córdoba. Our home was used to manufacture bombs employed in defence against the police during demonstrations. All of this took place in front of Tete’s eyes, and he once said to me: ‘Papa, either you let me help you or I’ll begin to act on my own, I’ll join another fighting organisation.’ What could I do but give in so that I could guide his activities and protect him from getting caught and suffering police repression.

“Tete was undoubtedly a democrat and anti-fascist at the time, but stood, well, not exactly aside of the political battles, but on his own. It was as if he were saving himself for more serious and decisive contests of the future.

“It goes without saying that because of his illness I did not prod him to take more active part in politics, but neither did I do anything to interfere with such activities. Everything that he did at the time he did on his own, he decided for himself how to act in any given situation.”

Once again I dug about in my notes and found a copy of a letter from Che to Fernando Barral, written in 1959 soon after the victory over Batista. I read the letter to Don Ernesto:

“ ‘Dear Fernando:

“ ‘I know that you had doubts about me as an individual, was I real or not, although in fact I am now quite different from the person you knew. Much water has flown under the bridge since that time and of the former asthmatic and individualist there remains only the asthma. I’ve been told that you’ve married; the same goes for me. I have two children, but I remain an adventure-lover, although today my adventures are in pursuit of the right goal. Give my greetings to your family from a relic of the past and please accept a fraternal embrace from Che, for that’s my new name.’

“Thus, as an individualist and adventure-lover, that’s how Che saw himself in his youth?”

“Well yes, that’s true,” agreed Don Ernesto.

It was already well past midnight. The thundershower had ended. We parted with Don Ernesto, this frank, honest and charming man so like his son Che.

## Character Formation

Through a combination of circumstances and probably because of my nature I began to travel about the American continent and came to know it well....

Ernesto Che Guevara

Julia, Alberto Granados' wife, brought us what must have been the tenth cup of aromatic *tinto*. We still had several waking hours before us. Alberto promised to tell me how his friendship with Che arose, and about their joint travels in Latin America.

Alberto had already written about this in his reminiscences about Che published in Cuban press. But it is one thing to read and another to listen to a first-hand account.

Few of Tete's friends in school or in the university could boast of real closeness with him. In fact he was very different from his peers. Che paid no attention to his external appearance; he went around in a crumpled jacket, floppy, worn-out shoes and with unkempt hair. The young Argentines around him were very trendy, took pride in polishing their boots to a brilliant shine and slicked down their hair.

Ernesto also stood out with his trenchant character, his sharp biting humour. What then attracted them to him? It must have been his inner qualities—his chivalry, his unfailing readiness to stand up for a comrade, his romanticism, imagination, and perhaps above all his courage. Despite his serious illness he not only kept up with but even forced ahead of the others in games, fun and the antics of the young. At the same time there existed an invisible barrier separating him from his friends and it was by no means easy to cross this barrier. Why was that? Could it be that behind it was hidden the poetic soul (recall the love of poetry which he never lost until the end of his life), or the soul of a vulnerable and easily wounded child suffering from a chronic disease? The only exceptions were Chinchina, Che's early sweetheart, and Alberto Granados.

Both of these exceptions were in fact logical, for young people such as he allow that protective barrier to be crossed either by a sweetheart who is often quite dissimilar in nature and mentality,



or by a friend who, while as different as chalk from cheese, does not intrude on the former's inner world or lay claim to the role of spiritual mentor and protector, or—as so often happens—become a tyrant, demanding in exchange for friendship blind submission and unconditional devotion. This was the kind of case where extremes met.

From Che himself we know little of his relationship with Chinchina but if we accept the reminiscences of her sister and other acquaintances, Che loved her and was planning to marry her. Chinchina, the daughter of one of the richest landowners in Córdoba, belonged to the upper circle of Argentinean “beef barons”. She was in command of all that had been denied the young Che: enviable good health, breathtaking beauty, the elegance and refinement of the aristocracy, and immense wealth. The scions of the “best” families in Córdoba tried to win her affection—and hand in marriage.

Che, for his part, attended formal parties in Chinchina's home dressed in his usual threadbare coat and dilapidated shoes, shocking the local snobs not only by his external appearance but by his biting replies to their questions and mordant comments on their political idols.

What was Che looking for? The love of Chinchina. He proposed that she leave her father's home, forget about her wealth, and go abroad with him (this was after he had returned from his first travels through Latin America) to Venezuela where he intended to work with his friend Alberto Granados in a leper colony, like Albert Schweitzer whom Che worshipped.

But Chinchina, an ordinary girl, loved Che with an ordinary love. She was prepared to marry Che but on the condition that he remained with her, or to put it more accurately—at her disposal. His quixotic project of moving to the Venezuelan wilds and devoting himself to healing the lepers struck her as touching and noble but completely unrealistic. An irreconcilable conflict broke out between the elevated and the mundane, the poetry and the banal prose of life. This conflict could not end in a compromise. Neither could budge from the adopted position. So they peacefully parted, she to a successful marriage and he along the road which allowed of no turning back.

Alberto Granados or Mial<sup>1</sup> as his friends called him was six

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviated from *Mi Alberto* (Spanish for “my Alberto”).

his striving towards a knowledge of the uncharted was resonant with Tete's nature. But, in addition to this, Alberto worked in a leper colony. Only a person of strong moral fiber and courage could choose such work as a profession. In addition this samaritan was graced with an indefatigable love of life which reminded one of Colas Breugnon, who he in fact resembled. Couldn't it have been precisely these features which drew Che to my interlocutor?

However let us listen to what Alberto Granados had to say:

"I had two brothers, Tomás Francisco and Gregorio Patricio. We were born in a little settlement called Hernando in southern Córdoba. As for me, I first completed the pharmaceutical programme in the university, but a career as a druggist didn't appeal to me. I became caught up in the problem of healing lepers and continued my studies in the university for another three years to become a bio-chemist. In 1945 I began to work in a leper colony located 180 kilometres from Córdoba.

"I first met Che in 1941 when he was 13 years old—through my brother Tomás. They were classmates in the Dean Funes College. We were brought together by a love of reading and a passion for nature. I became a frequent guest in the Guevara home where I made use of a wonderful library as if it were my own. Che was an inveterate debater and I spent more than one night with him arguing until we were hoarse over some author or another.

"My brothers and I spent all our free days in the beautiful vicinity of Córdoba where we lived like free savages in the wilds. Che almost always joined up with us. His parents let him go without reservation, for the clean mountain air helped him in his fight against asthma and our long hikes on foot strengthened his organism and gave him stamina. To be sure, at the time doctors thought that strenuous exercise was dangerous for an asthmatic but as young medics we held another opinion, namely that sport was the best remedy against this illness. Che's relatives shared this opinion. Che quickly mastered the lore of nature while in these surroundings. He learned how to make a shelter of branches and how to light a fire. This all came of use when he fought in the hills of the Sierra Maestra. Of course, way back then it never entered our heads that he would later have to use his woodsmanship for guerrilla warfare.

“Certainly we knew that in the early nineteenth century our patriots had carried on guerrilla actions against the Spaniards. We were aware of the warfare waged by the peasant leaders Pancho Villa and Zapata during the Mexican Revolution. We knew of the struggle of the Nicaraguans, led by the legendary General Sandino, against the interventionist Yankees. We had information about the guerrilla warfare in China. We were enthralled with the feats of the Soviet partisans in the rear of the German troops during the Second World War. But none of us, including Che, imagined at that time that such was possible for us. I don't mean to say that we stood apart from the political struggle. It was quite the opposite. Throughout the country students were active participants. We considered ourselves anti-imperialists and anti-fascists and we organised strikes and demonstrations, and fought with the police.

“Córdoba is one of Argentina's major cultural centres. We call it ‘docta Córdoba’ which means ‘learned’ or ‘wise Córdoba’. In addition to the university which was founded in 1613 and as such is one of the oldest in America, there are a Museum of Natural History, a large Zoo and an Academy of Fine Arts. The city is praised for its freedom-loving traditions. It was our university campus in 1918 that harboured the student movement for university reform which proceeded under anti-imperialist slogans and then swept through all the universities of Latin America. In the 1930s an influential group was formed in Córdoba under the leadership of the eminent popular writer Decodoro Roca and boldly opposed police repression and fascism. Our city also nurtured such progressive organisations as the Committee for Aid to the Soviet Union and many others.

“I myself took part in the student movement. In 1943 I was arrested along with several other students after a demonstration against police intrusions on the territory of the university. My brother Tomás came with Ernesto to visit me at the police station. I asked them to bring college students into the streets with the demand to free the arrested immediately. I have to admit that Che's answer to my request caught me off balance: ‘What do you mean, Mial, go into the streets, just so they can beat you over the heads with clubs! No thanks, I'll hit the street only when they give me a *bufoso* [pistol]:

“Another reply of his stuck in my mind as well. When travelling through Latin America we arrived in Peru and visited the ancient

Inca city of Machupicchu. We climbed all over the ruins and then sat down in a square near one of the ancient temples where according to legend the Inca priests carried out human sacrifices. We began to drink *mate* and let our imagination run free. I said to Che: 'You know, old man, let's stay here. I'll marry an Indian from a prominent Inca family, proclaim myself emperor and become the ruler of Peru. I'll appoint you Prime Minister and together we'll carry out a social revolution.' Che answered: 'You're out of your mind, Mial, revolutions are not made without shooting.' "

"Alberto, tell me in more detail about this trip."

"I had a long-standing dream of visiting the Latin American countries, of which we, though neighbours, knew very little. We knew more about events and life in general in Spain, France or the United States than about what was going on in the republics on our continent. I also had a purely personal professional interest in this trip: I intended to visit leper colonies in the neighbouring countries, study the work done there, and perhaps write a book on the subject.

"Of course I didn't have the money for such a trip but I did have 'wheels', an old motorcycle which I constantly repaired and hoped to bring into working order. Concerning outlays on food, well, I didn't worry much about it. I counted on odd jobs and also on the solidarity of my colleagues—doctors in leper colonies.

"The day arrived when my 'steed' was ready for the trip. At the time the Guevara family already lived in Buenos Aires where Che was studying in the medical department and took a special course in the institute for research on allergies, headed by the eminent Argentine scholar Doctor Salvador Pisani. The Guevara family was living through difficult financial times and Ernesto worked on the side as a librarian in the municipal library. He came to Córdoba for the vacation and visited me in the leper colony. He took an interest in new methods for treating lepers and helped me with my experiments.

"During one such visit in September 1951, I, on the urging of my brother Tomás, suggested to Che that he be my companion on the upcoming trip.

"Ernesto had dreamed of travelling since childhood. He had a passion for knowledge of the reality surrounding him, and not so much through book learning as through personal contact with

that reality. He took a lively interest in the lives of his fellow countrymen not only in the capital but also in the remote provinces. He wanted to know how the Argentine peasants, farm labourers and Indians fared. Finally, he wanted to see what his homeland looked like, to feast his eyes on the boundless plains—the pampas, on the mountains and the torrid northern regions where plantations of cotton and *mate*, Paraguayan tea, were located. But that wouldn't be enough, for once seeing it all he'd realise that he needed to look at the other Latin American countries, come to know the lives, hopes and fears of the many nations of the continent. Only then could a correct answer be found to the question which was bothering him more and more: how could the lives of the peoples living on the continent be changed for the better, how could they be released from poverty and disease, how could they be freed from the oppression of the landowners, capitalists and foreign monopolies?

“So it should come as no surprise that Che was only too glad to accept my proposition, and only asked that I wait until he could pass the coming examinations. At the time he was in his last year of study in the medical department. Che's parents had no objections to his going with me, but under the condition that we be gone no more than a year and that Ernesto return in time to take his final exams.

“On December 29, 1951, loading down our ‘steed’ with equipment, a light tent, blankets, and arming ourselves with an automatic pistol and a camera we set out. On the way we stopped by to say goodbye to Chinchina, she gave Che 15 dollars with the request to bring her a lace dress. Ernesto gave her a little dog called ‘Comeback’. We also parted with Ernesto's parents. There was nothing more to keep us in Argentina and we set out for Chile, the first foreign country lying in our path. Having crossed the province of Mendoza, where Che's ancestors had lived at one time and where we visited some haciendas to see how horses are tamed and how our gaucho lives, we then turned to the south, to avoid the peaks of the Andes, which were impassable for our puny two-wheeled Rocinante. We had to cope with a good many headaches. The motorcycle repeatedly broke down and needed servicing. We seemed to be pushing it more than riding on it.

“On the road we spent the nights in field and forest, depending on which was at hand. It was more difficult with food. The handful of coins we started out with were exhausted after the first

few days, we also raced through Chinchina's 15 dollars, then had to earn our bread 'by the sweat of our brows'. We washed dishes in restaurants, treated the peasants, worked as veterinarians, stevedores, porters, sailors, we repaired radios in the villages. Leper colonies served as life-saving oases which we headed for as a Muslim heads for Mecca. There we replenished ourselves, not only physically but mentally, for we exchanged knowledge with our local colleagues and learned much that was both useful and interesting. Ernesto felt a growing involvement in the problem of studying and treating leprosy. Like myself, he had no fear or revulsion when dealing with lepers. On the contrary, the sight of these unfortunates rejected and forgotten by both society and friends brought out a warm empathy in him and helped foster the idea of dedicating his life to treating the afflicted.

"On February 18, 1952, we arrived in the Chilean city of Temuco. On the next day the local newspaper *Diario Austral* printed an article about us which was reprinted in *Granma* soon after Che died in October 1967."

"I have the text of this article," I told Alberto, and to give him a chance to rest and finish his cup of hot *tinto*, which Julia, smiling sadly and understandingly, offered us, I read aloud the article from *Diario Austral*, entitled 'Two Argentine Experts in Leprosy Travel Through Latin America on a Motorcycle'. It read as follows:

"Yesterday saw the arrival in Temuco of doctor of biochemistry Señor Alberto Granados and final-year student in the department of medicine at the University of Buenos Aires Señor Ernesto Guevara Serná who are journeying by motorcycle through the major Latin American countries.

"The motorcyclists began their travels in the province of Córdoba on December 29. They headed to the south through Mendoza and Salta, and entered Chile crossing the border at Peulla. They have made stops at Petrobue, Osorno and Valdivia, and from there travelled by motorcycle to Temuco, where they arrived yesterday.

### *Specialists in Leprosy*

'Our learned guests are specialists in leprosy and allied diseases. They have a good deal of experience with the corresponding situation in their country. There are approximately three

thousand of those afflicted with the disease receiving treatment in leprosaria in Serritos, Diamantes, General Rodriguez, Córdoba and Posadas.

'They have also visited leper colonies in Brazil, the country with the highest rates of those afflicted with the disease.

### *'Interested in Visiting Easter Island*

'In addition to their plans to learn of health conditions in the various countries of Latin America, Señores Granados and Guevara, travelling at their own expense, are especially interested in visiting the Chilean leprosarium in Rapa-Nui. Our friends hope, upon arriving in Valparaiso, to establish contact with the leaders of the Easter Island Friendship Society and investigate the possibility of visiting this distant leprosarium, located on our island in the Pacific.

'The travelling scientists plan to conclude their expedition in Venezuela.

'After their one-day stop in Temuco, Señores Granados and Guevara will continue their travels tomorrow morning in the direction of Concepción'."

Alberto laughed.

"Yes, they certainly got their story mixed up! We had not been to Brazil of course. But we did dream of going to Easter Island. But in Valparaiso, the place where Che's ancestors set out in search for Californian gold a century ago, we were told that we had to wait six months for the steamer to Easter Island. So, unfortunately we were obliged to give up the idea of competing with Thor Heyerdahl. Easter Island, to be sure, does have a certain place in Che's biography, but it is connected with his time in Bolivia.

"From Valparaiso we continued on our travels, but now on foot, hitchhiking and hopping trains and steamships. Our two-wheeled Rocinante gave up the ghost not far from Santiago. Nothing could get it working again and we had to make a tearful parting with our friend. We put it in a 'tomb'—a hut—said our last farewells and continued on our way.

"We made it on foot to the Chuquicamata Copper Mines belonging to the American Braden Copper Mining Company. We spent the night in the barracks of the mine guards.

"In Peru we got a first-hand view of the life and customs of the

Quechua and Aymara Indians, vegetating in hopeless poverty, downtrodden and exploited by the landowners and authorities, poisoned by the coca leaves<sup>1</sup> which they consume in order to relieve their hunger. We were interested in the traces of the ancient Inca civilisation. In Cuzco, which we reached not without incident, Ernesto spent hours on end in the local library, immersing himself in books on the ancient Incan Empire. We spent several days among the picturesque ruins of Machupicchu, the immense dimensions of which so amazed Ernesto that he expressed his intention of devoting his energies to the study of the Incas of bygone days. I even nicknamed him the 'archeologist'.

"Che cited with rapture the inspired lines by Pablo Neruda dedicated to the holy city of the Incas:

*And so I mounted the causeway of the earth that rose before me,  
climbing from atrocious tangles intertwined in lost forests  
to meet you, Machupicchu.  
City built on high of rocks to form a terrace,  
at last an abode from which the terrestrial  
did not seek to hide, draping vestures of deep slumber.  
In you, like two straight lines running parallel,  
the cradle of the lightning and of Mankind,  
intertwined to a wind of many splinters.  
Mother of rocks, you are the spume that floats with condors.  
Elevated stepping stones of the dawning of mankind.  
Wooden shade lost in this first of arenas."*

I told Mial that a year ago the writer S. S. Smirnov had also visited Peru and been similarly struck by Machupicchu. Then I read him a Spanish translation of the description of this "Peruvian miracle" from Smirnov's essays on Peru:

"There are many stunning ruins in the world—monuments to the labour and art of our distant ancestors. Somewhere in the Himalayas, the Pamirs or in these very Cordilleras you may find an alpine landscape of no less beauty and every bit as primitive and wild. But it is just that combination of the works of man and the majesty of nature which makes Machupicchu a unique and incomparable spot. It is with a strange and unexpected sensation of sudden discovery that the realisation dawns that this city and

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<sup>1</sup> The leaves of the coca plant, the source of cocaine.



the huge stairway were built by people like you and I, so dwarfed by the gigantic mountains and bottomless abysses—but nevertheless their conquerors. It is as if an invisible but unbreakable thread were suddenly extended between these stone boxes that were the dwellings and temples of the Incas, from the steps of that stairway which climbs into the sky, to you and me, the present generation, who fly high in the sky in our jet airplanes, who have burst into interplanetary space, who have walked on the soil of the Moon and split the nucleus of the atom. The thread extends through the centuries and continues somewhere into the distant future. And you feel a moment of true happiness, prompted by the pride in the son of the Earth, in mankind and in belonging to the human race. People of today should be grateful to the once lost and now recovered city of the Incas, the 'Peruvian miracle'—if only for this feeling, for the blissful pride of self-awareness and self-affirmation engendered by the sight."

Mial listened attentively:

"The impressions recorded by your Soviet writer are so close to those we experienced when visiting Machupicchu. To us this dead city seemed vibrant with life. The very fact of its existence inspired us with hope for a bright future for our peoples. The descendants of those who built Machupicchu will sooner or later throw off the centuries-old chains of slavery. We were convinced of this and imagined how an Indian army under the leadership of a new Tupac Amaru<sup>1</sup>, of course with our active participation, would finally arouse ancient Peru to a happy and free life....

"So, from Machupicchu we went deep into the mountains, to the settlement of Huambo, with a side-trip to the leper colony founded by the scientist and devoted doctor Hugo Pesche, a member of the Communist Party of Peru. He greeted us warmly, showed us his methods of treatment and gave us a recommendation for another major leper colony near the city of San Pablo in the Peruvian province of Loreto.

"It wasn't so easy to make our way to San Pablo. In the settlement of Pucalpa, on the Rio Ucayali we managed to get on a ship which took us to Iquitos, a port located on the bank of the Amazon. This was the district where one of the first Peruvian guerrilla units began to function in the 'sixties. In Iquitos we were

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<sup>1</sup> The Indian leader who headed the uprising against Spanish dominance in the second half of the 18th century.

delayed for some time, since Ernesto's health deteriorated apparently because of the pervasive dampness and fish diet. Asthma was literally suffocating him and he was forced to take to bed for rest in a local infirmary. But his iron will helped Ernesto overcome not only this asthma attack, but a thousand other obstacles in our way.

"I should point out that Che wasn't an easy travelling companion. He was trenchant, even sarcastic, and I can say at least I was never bored. There were times when we argued and even quarreled over trifles. But you know, neither of us were vengeful, and we'd soon cool down, continuing in peace and agreement until the next "conflict". Nevertheless he was an ideal partner. Despite his ailment, he shared all burdens on the road and never would allow special consideration for his illness. In difficult situations he demonstrated an enviable fortitude, and once he decided to do something he would carry it through to the end.

"His stay in the Iquitos hospital quickly brought him back on his feet and soon we could resume our travels on the Amazon in the direction of San Pablo.

"The doctors in the leprosarium in San Pablo greeted us warmly and offered us a laboratory, inviting us to take part in treating the afflicted. We tried to apply psychotherapy and arranged amusements for the lepers. We organised a soccer team made up of the afflicted, set up competitions, hunted with them for monkeys, talked with them on various subjects. Our attention and amicable relations with them considerably elevated their spirits. They became truly attached to us. Trying to find some way to thank us they built us a raft like the Kon-Tiki, so that we could reach the next point on our journey, Leticia, the Colombian port likewise situated on the banks of the Amazon.

"On the eve of our departure from San Pablo, a delegation of lepers, men, women and children, came to say farewell. Their ship floated up to the dock where our raft, named the Mambo-Tango in our honour, was tied up. The Tango, of course, is an Argentine dance by origin, and the Mambo is a Peruvian dance. This exotic name was to symbolise Argentine-Peruvian friendship. It rained but this didn't dampen the enthusiasm of those seeing us off. At first they sang songs in our honour, then three of the lepers gave farewell speeches. They couldn't express themselves perfectly, but

it came straight from the heart. Then I spoke and, like Ernesto, was very upset to be leaving these simple and good people, with whom we had made such good friends during our brief stay in San Pablo.

"On the next day, June 21, 1952, having piled our meager belongings on the Mambo-Tango we set out with the current down the mighty Amazon in the direction of Leticia. The current carried us along. Ernesto took a lot of photographs and kept a diary—following my example. Taking in the wild tropical scenery, we, much to our chagrin, floated right past Leticia without noticing it and learned of it only when our Mambo-Tango landed on a large island, which turned out to be Brazilian territory. It would have been hopeless to try to float upstream against the current. We had to exchange our Mambo-Tango for a boat and make up the difference with what remained of our meager savings.

"As a result we arrived in Leticia not only worn out but without a centavo in our pockets. Our disreputable appearance naturally aroused the suspicions of the police, and we soon ended up behind bars. This time the renown of Argentine soccer saved us. When the police chief, a real *hinch*a (fan), learned that we were Argentines he offered us our freedom in exchange for our consent to be the coaches for the local soccer team, which was about to take part in the district competitions. And when "our" team won, the grateful fanatics of the leather ball bought us tickets on a plane which got us safely to Bogotá, the capital of Colombia.

"At that time President Laureanó Gómez ruled in Colombia. *La Violencia*—pervasive violence—ruled supreme in the country. The army and police were waging war against the intransigent peasantry. Murders of people in the bad books of the authorities were carried out daily. The prisons were overflowing with those incarcerated for political "crimes". The police here also gave us a warm welcome—they seized us and threw us in prison. We had to promise the authorities to leave Colombia without delay. Student acquaintances collected travel money for us and we set out by bus for the city of Cucuta bordering on Venezuela. From Cucuta we crossed the border by an international bridge and found ourselves in the Venezuelan city of San Cristóbal, and from there we made it safely to Caracas, the final destination of our journey, on July 14, 1952. A month before this Che turned 24.

"The time had come to return to Argentina. I, however, decided to throw out an anchor in Venezuela. This wasn't only because of the interesting work which I had been offered in the Caracas leper colony, but also because there I met Julia. I began to talk over with Che how he could make it back to Buenos Aires alone. As was usually the case, we were flat broke. But Fate continued to smile upon us as it had throughout the journey. In Caracas Che ran into a distant relative, a dealer in thoroughbred horses. This relative delivered racing horses from Buenos Aires to Miami, Florida, with a stop-off in Caracas. In Miami he bought work horses, which he shipped by air to the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo, where he sold them. From Maracaibo the plane flew empty to Buenos Aires. He suggested to Che that he accompany the next party of horses from Caracas to Miami, and from there return to Buenos Aires via Maracaibo, and he even promised him pocket money for expenses. Che agreed and we parted at the end of July. He promised to return to Caracas after passing his exams and receiving his degree, to work as a doctor in the leprosarium. But these plans were not destined to materialise. The next time I saw him was only after the victory of the Cuban Revolution, in Havana in the office of the President of the National Bank of Cuba, his new position. This was on June 18, 1960.

"To round off the story of our travels I should add that Che was delayed in Miami for an entire month. His money dried up rapidly, although he did manage to buy the promised lace dress for Chinchina. In Miami he lived in semi-starvation, busying himself in the local library.

"In August 1952 Che returned to Buenos Aires and 'hit the books.' He had to write up his dissertation on allergies and to take a good number of final exams. He made haste to cut his ties with the university for another reason as well: according to the new law to go into effect in the following year he would have had to take an exam on "justicialismo", Perón's socio-political doctrine, and it obviously went against the grain with him.

"In March 1953 Ernesto finally graduated as a surgeon and specialist in dermatology. But he still couldn't consider himself a free citizen for a conscription notice from the army. Not wanting to serve in the "gorilla" army Che took an ice-cold bath bringing on a new bout of asthma, after which he appeared before a medical commission which declared him unfit for military service.

"Now he was really a 'free bird' and could choose any of the roads in front of him. He could begin a medical career in his homeland or return to Caracas, where the leprosarium offered him a job of doctor with a monthly salary of US \$800. But as we know Che made a different decision. I guess this was his destiny."

"Tell me, Alberto, after you parted with Che in Caracas, did you correspond with him?"

"While he was in Buenos Aires, yes. I was convinced that he would return to Caracas. Then, when he set out on this second trip through Latin America, he sent me a postcard from Guayaquil, Ecuador, with the following content: 'Mial, I'm headed for Guatemala. Write you from there.' This ended our communication until the overthrow of Batista, when I sent Che a letter in Havana, to which he soon replied. Che wrote that he had hoped to come to Caracas with Fidel but had fallen ill, and so no meeting took place. As for me I felt pulled to Cuba but my plans were pushed back for a number of reasons. In 1960 another letter arrived from Che—on May 13. In it he invited us to make Cuba our permanent home. Che asked: 'Could you ever have imagined that your friend who loved to sit around talking and drinking *mate* would turn into a person who works tirelessly and with firm purpose?'"

"Yes, the revolution changed Tete, made him an iron-clad fighter and inexhaustible worker. We became convinced of these changes when finally in the same year we arrived on the Isle of Freedom and met with him. Now he knew the answers to the questions which had tormented him in his youth. But one thing hadn't changed: he remained just as modest and indifferent to material comfort. Che took the praise and popularity which came in his direction with a grain of humour. While one of the revolution's leaders and a minister he continued to lead his spartan way of life, often consciously denying himself even minimal comforts. Out of the entire range of human weaknesses, Che had only three: tobacco, books and chess."

"Che often said that a revolutionary statesman must lead a monastic way of life. This makes sense, after all in our countries the majority of bureaucrats, and particularly high-paid ones, spend their time making a fortune, pilfering the state treasury, taking bribes, living in luxurious villas, drinking and debauching themselves."

“Arriving in 1960 in Cuba we followed Che’s advice and settled in Santiago where I began to teach in the department of medicine in the local university. Che used to tell us: ‘Live modestly, don’t try to create a capitalist environment under socialism.’ Of course, we had no such inclination.

“When his book *Guerrilla Warfare* came out he presented me a copy with the following inscription: ‘I hope that you don’t make it through life without smelling gunpowder or hearing the battle-cry of the people—it is a sublime form of experiencing strong emotions, no less vivid and more useful than those we lived through on the Amazon.’

“He gave me another book with his inscription before leaving Cuba. He told me that he was leaving, but where or why he didn’t say and I didn’t ask. He wrote me: ‘I don’t know what to leave you. I oblige you to go and cut sugar cane. My mobile home once again will rest on two legs and my dreams will know no bounds until a bullet puts a full stop to them. I’ll wait for you, my sedentary gypsy, when the smoke of battle clears. I embrace you all including Tomás. Che.’ ”

“Did Che have personal reasons,” I asked Alberto, “other than the political, which drove him to leave Cuba and head a guerrilla movement in Bolivia?”

“With Che words and actions were never separated. He would never instruct anyone to carry out a task which he could not or was not prepared himself to carry out at any moment. He believed that the force of example was as significant as theoretical argumentation. In our countries personal example exerts an enormous impact. We’ve always had more than our share of theoreticians, and especially of ‘coffee-cup strategists’—but few real men of action. Che belonged among the latter. While in the Sierra Maestra he not only fought but treated the wounded, dug ditches, built and organised workshops and carried loads on his back. He bore the load not merely of a commander but of a rank-and-file soldier to boot. He acted just the same when he was Minister of Industry: he worked on construction sites, helped unload ships, ran a tractor, cut sugar cane.

“On the surface he could be curt and even crude but we, his friends, knew how sensitive and responsive he really was. He was deeply affected when learning of the death of his comrades and close friends and also those who after the victory of the Cuban Revolution followed his example and unfurled the banner of guer-

rilla war in various places in Latin America. Once he bitterly complained to me: 'Mial! While I sit at my desk my friends are dying by clumsily applying my guerrilla tactics.'

"Before his departure he said: 'I'll never return home vanquished. I prefer death to defeat.' He wasn't just weaving elegant phrases."

Alberto removed Che's *Guerrilla Warfare* from the bookshelf.

"Che wrote this book in 1960. He dedicated it to another hero of the Cuban Revolution, Camilo Cienfuegos. Camilo died a tragic death. A plane he was on disappeared en route between Camagüey and Havana. It's possible that the airplane was brought down by counterrevolutionaries or exploded over the ocean because of sabotage.

"In his dedication Che wrote: 'Camilo was a companion of a hundred battles, an intimate counselor of Fidel in difficult moments of the war. This stoic fighter always made self-sacrifice an instrument for steeling his own character and forging the morale of his troops.... But Camilo should not be seen as a solitary hero performing marvelous feats only on the impulse of his individual genius, but rather as a true part of the people that formed him, as it always forms its heroes and leaders in the course of a rigorous struggle....

" 'Camilo practiced loyalty like a religion. He was its votary, both in his personal loyalty to Fidel, who embodied as no one else the will of the people, and in his loyalty to the people themselves....

" 'Camilo did not measure danger: he used it for a diversion, mocked it, lured, toyed, and played with it. In his mentality as guerrilla fighter a plan was not to be postponed on account of a cloud.'

"Everything that Che wrote about Camilo could be said about him as well. One only has to replace the name Camilo with Che in the text, and you'll have a very precise portrait of the friend and comrade of my youth.

"That's the way Che was. He was incapable of changing."

Alberto fell silent. The first rays of the morning sun peeped through the blinds.

I gathered up my notes.

Julia came in. She had also kept going throughout the night. We drank a last cup of *tinto* and parted.

## A Lost Battle

**I began to be a revolutionary in Guatemala.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

**He was suffused with a deep hatred and scorn for imperialism, not only because he had a highly developed political awareness, but because not so long ago, while in Guatemala, he had the opportunity of witnessing criminal imperialist aggression, when military hirelings crushed the revolution in that country.**

**Fidel Castro**

What was this 24 year old Argentine with a certificate to practice dermatology really striving for, what goals had he set for himself and why did he leave the country so hastily? Che himself helped provide the answers to these questions. After the victory of the Cuban Revolution Che described many times with extreme, even merciless frankness what he had been like before he cast his lot with Fidel Castro in July 1955 in Mexico.

In a speech to Cuban doctors in Havana on August 19, 1960, Che said that when he began his studies of medicine the revolutionary views he later acquired were not numbered among his ideals. He said that like everyone else he had wanted success; he had dreamed of becoming a famous researcher and working without respite to discover something of benefit to mankind—but all this had been a dream about personal success. In his own words, he was a product of his environment.

The big change came during his travels with Granados. What struck Guevara more than anything else when he travelled along the Pacific coast of South America, visiting copper mines, Indian settlements, leper colonies? It was the hopeless poverty and backwardness of the peasants, Indians, of workers of this huge continent, contrasted to the callousness, venality and dissoluteness of the elite which exploits, plunders and deceives masses of people.



In the same speech Che said that he had seen how parents could not have their child cured for the lack of money; that he observed human degradation so bad that the father accepted the death of a child almost indifferently because of constant starvation and distress. And he understood that there was a mission of no less importance than becoming a famed researcher or making a major contribution to medical science—that of coming to the aid of these people.

But in what way? How could they be helped? What had to be done to relieve them, to save them from poverty and the reign of lawlessness and make them the full and equal masters of their destiny and of the immense natural wealth about them?

Through philanthropic activities, through “small deeds” and gradual reform? A variety of bourgeois politicians had already attempted all this. But their attempts at reform had only led to even greater enslavement of their countries by foreign monopolies. No! In order to change the destinies of the peoples of Latin America, to release them from the vice of poverty and arbitrary rule and free them from imperialism, there was but one way—cutting the evil at the roots through a social revolution. It was precisely this conclusion that Che reached after his first journey through Latin America. He still didn’t know the wheres, whos and hows of this revolution, and much remained unclear and unfixed in his mind, but he already had the firm decision that if sometime, somewhere, somebody began such a revolution, he would be a participant. And when in July 1953 he parted with his relatives and friends at the Belgrano terminal in Buenos Aires and told them “You are parting with a soldier of America”—he had that in mind.

The American author Daniel James who wrote a biography of Che used every device to try to distort and discredit Che’s image in accordance with the wishes of those who killed him. With naive disingenuousness he asks in his book: “The interesting question presents itself: Why didn’t a mind as wide-ranging and inquiring as Ernesto Guevara’s study other countries where other, peaceful solutions were being worked out or at least tried? If his hatred for the United States precluded him from examining its society dispassionately, what about such lands as Sweden or Israel, where social experiments closer to his thinking were going on? Why was he unable to see beyond the deadening monoculture that is Latin America? Why was his mind, at so young an

age, already closed to other experiences and other answers to man's age-old problems?"

Daniel James refrains from answering these emotional questions. The answer could only be one: the reason why Che chose the path of social revolution is to be found in the policy of enslavement and abuse that US imperialists practiced in Latin America throughout the decades. The American monopolies, banks, trusts seized the fundamental wealth of the Latin American countries, while the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA made interference in the political life of these countries their standard practice. It was not only that the ruling circles in the United States feared a communist revolution in Latin America, they dreaded any serious attempt at bourgeois reform because it would negatively affect monopoly interests and threaten the bank accounts of the Wall Street magnates.

Any attempt at reform was met by Washington with economic sanctions or armed intervention. Reformists, even of the most timid variety, were overthrown on order from Washington by "gorillas" specially trained for the purpose. Others were tamed by blackmail, threats or wretched hand-outs. It was by decree of Washington that political figures such as Guiteras in Cuba and Gaitan in Colombia who advocated independent positions were killed, and that the democratic regime of President Gallegos was overthrown in Venezuela. "Reformers" such as González Videla in Chile were brought to heel. "Gorillas" devoted to the Pentagon such as Odría in Peru were brought to power. Over the decades local tyrants serving both Washington and oligarchy drove into the underground Communists and other fighters for genuine democracy and the happiness of their peoples. They were left to rot in fetid prisons, tortured and killed. All of this the young Argentine doctor Ernesto Guevara saw and realised, just as did his peers and friends. However, not all of them came to the same conclusion. Ernesto made for himself the only correct one. He understood that to find justice the social system had to be changed.

Of course this was not a unique discovery by Che. Long before, the Communists arguing from the great teachings of Marxism-Leninism had called for just such changes. It goes without saying that the young Ernesto had read Marx and Lenin, and not only them but their opponents too. In bourgeois journals he read not only, or rather not so much praise as slander and wild

falsehood about the Soviet Union and Communists. He had an opportunity to choose. What made him choose the revolution? The answer is to be found in his personal experience and noble striving to serve the destitute.

Does this mean that when parting with friends and relatives at the Belgrano terminal the future soldier of revolution considered himself a Communist? Not at all. There are many roads leading to communism. For some it is the light which illuminates the path directly from the kingdom of darkness to that of freedom. Others come to communism through disillusionment with their earlier ideals, by passing through a difficult re-evaluation of their attitudes and overcoming national blinkers, the superstitions imposed by environment and egocentrism. Ernesto Guevara, as distinct from many other representatives of the middle strata, was not burdened by frozen habit or views which like an impenetrable wall would fence him off from new, revolutionary ideas. Moreover, his intellectual development was directly associated with the rejection of these habits and views. But a positive programme took shape slowly for him. It matured only gradually and this is why the future soldier of revolution set out for the time being to help his friend Granados treat lepers in Caracas.

But then why instead of taking a plane or boat, did he choose the train travelling to the capital of Bolivia, La Paz<sup>1</sup>? He explained his strange routing to Venezuela to his friends and relatives by his lack of money to purchase a plane or boat ticket. To be sure, he didn't have much money in his pocket, and took the "milk train" which stopped at every other settlement to pick up cans of milk from the local farmers. But could it really be that a doctor who anticipated a healthy monthly salary of \$800 in Caracas couldn't borrow \$200 from someone to make it to Venezuela by air or sea? Something was not quite right here. But what exactly?

Che was travelling to Bolivia because he'd never been there before and he had set himself the goal of seeing every country in Latin America. And still, this time it was not the ruins of ancient Indian temples or even the hungry and destitute Quechua Indians that attracted him to Bolivia. He couldn't wait to see the Bolivian revolution with his own eyes.

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<sup>1</sup> The official capital is Sucre, but the actual capital is La Paz, the seat of government and legislative organs.

Bolivia is referred to as a "pauper on a golden throne". This country holds fabulous natural resources—oil, tin, gold—but all of these treasures had been seized by foreign monopolies which drew enormous profits from tapping them. The people lived in hopeless poverty and ignorance, downtrodden and racked with disease, poisoned by the coca leaf. The living standard of millions of people in this country, mainly Indians and mestizos, was until recently one of the lowest in the world, while the rate of infant mortality was one of the highest.

Until the early 1950s very few people outside of Bolivia took an interest in this country, with the exception of agents of tin and oil monopolies. The capital La Paz located at an altitude of roughly four thousand metres above sea level is so inaccessible to outsiders that it is called the "graveyard of foreigners". According to the Bolivian writer Luis Luksic in the early 1960s people from other countries appeared in La Paz as rarely as they did in the wilds of Central Africa or in Tibet. The climate—both physical and political—was unhealthy. "Revolutions" occurred at the rate of two a year and were accompanied by much blood-letting.

This is how the contemporary Swedish writer Artur Lundkvist describes the Bolivian capital: "Steep streets lead to Murillo Square which is surrounded by the presidential palace, the seat of government and a cathedral. The lamp posts seem to be specially designed for hanging presidents and ministers. You seem to sense the existence of secret exits in the city's outlying streets, through which the big shots can make a rapid egress at the eleventh hour taking with them the state gold or an even bigger sum of money. The miners organise demonstrations on these streets, having first stuffed their pockets with dynamite, and here present ultimatums to the government. It is not a rare occurrence when a statesman is chopped up into pieces or simply shot and then thrown from the balcony to lie on the stone pavement."

This unusual city could not but interest the young Argentine doctor who was eager for new impressions. But no matter how much the contrasts of the Bolivian capital attracted him, this time his overriding interest was in learning about the new developments in this country in recent times.

On April 9, 1952, yet another, the 179th by tally, revolution took place. As distinct from the multitude of preceding ones, this revolution, in which miners and peasants took part, truly put

Bolivia on the road to progress. The National Revolutionary Movement had come to power and its leader Paz Estenssoro became the country's president. The new government nationalised the tin mines—though paying a generous compensation to the foreign companies. It set in motion an agrarian reform and organised a militia of miners and peasants. These measures, though limited, were definitely promising. Many progressive intellectuals and political figures came to Bolivia to partake of the experience. Following their example Ernesto Guevara decided to travel to Caracas via La Paz.

In Bolivia Che met with representatives of the government, visited miners' settlements and villages of the mountain Indians. He even worked for a spell in the office of information and culture and in the agrarian reform department.

Of course here in Bolivia he pursued his interest in archaeological antiquities and visited the ruins of the fabled Indian sanctuary of Tiahuanaco near lake Titicaca. Infatuated with photography he took dozens of snaps of the Sun Gate—a temple where once the Indians paid homage to Viracocha—the Sun God.

But while the ancient world of the Indians here as elsewhere exerted what was almost a magical influence upon him, and while the Indians themselves, those taciturn, humble yet menacing beings seemed to cast a spell over him, the Bolivian revolution on the other hand disillusioned him. This was above all because the Indians, the original inhabitants of this country, continued to live outside the framework of society, to eke out a miserable existence just as they had in the past when their lives had been controlled by the Spanish conquistadores.

The leaders of this revolution aroused his distrust and antipathy. Bourgeois figures, they tried to retard rather than to deepen the revolutionary process, they kowtowed to Washington and many of them were engaged in a variety of financial manipulations and profiteering. The trade unions were managed by slippery political figures. As far as the Communist Party was concerned, it had been founded only in 1950 and had not as yet gained noticeable influence over the country's working masses.

No, Bolivia's hour had not yet arrived. Obviously, it did not occur to Ernesto Guevara that he would return here in the not too distant future to fight for these Indians, the descendants of the once powerful Inca tribes, and it would be here that his brief

but glorious life as a revolutionary would come to an end. But the fact that in 1953 he visited this country, travelled its width and breadth, studied it, "grasped" its problems—played a definite role in his decision to return to the familiar plateau.

In La Paz Che made the acquaintance of a young Argentine lawyer named Ricardo Rojo.<sup>1</sup> Fleeing from police persecution, Rojo had found refuge in the Guatemalan Embassy in Buenos Aires. The incident triggered the idea of travelling to Guatemala.

At that time, the man in power in Guatemala was President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, who demonstrated a bravery uncommon to statesmen in Central America. He dared to nationalise part of the land held by the "Green Monster" or "Mamita Yunai" as Latin Americans call the United Fruit Company. Arbenz' predecessor as president had been a democratically inclined professor of philosophy named Juan José Arévalo. He once lived in exile in Argentina where he had a wide circle of friends. Rojo received letters of recommendation from some of them, which he hoped to use to establish himself comfortably in Guatemala. Rojo persuaded Che to make his way there with him.

Che agreed to the proposition, but only as far as Colombia. Disillusioned with the Bolivian Revolution he was very critical about Rojo's enraptured words on the Guatemalan government. He still intended to go to Caracas, where Mial awaited him with impatience in the local leper colony.

Rojo flew to Lima while Guevara and the Argentine student Carlos Ferrer crossed Titicaca, the world's highest lake that marks the border between Bolivia and Peru. They arrived in Cuzco, which Che had already visited on his last journey. Here they were retained by border guards, taken for dangerous agitators but then released minus their books and brochures about the Bolivian revolution. Soon the travellers reached Lima where they met up with Rojo.

The situation in Peru was not enviable. The country was ruled by the tyrant Odría, a hireling of Washington, and the jails were overflowing with political prisoners. It would have been dangerous to drag their feet in Lima, so, collecting some money, Rojo, Ferrer and Guevara grabbed a bus and headed along the Pacific

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<sup>1</sup> Rojo was a bourgeois politician who after Che's death made use of his acquaintance to publish sensational falsehoods which gained wide circulation in the reactionary press.

coast to Ecuador whose border they crossed on September 26, 1953.

In Guayaquil they asked the Colombian consul for a visa. The consul didn't object but insisted that the travellers produce a plane ticket to Bogotá. Another coup had just taken place in Colombia: the tyrant Laureano Gómez had been overthrown by General Rojas Pinilla. The consul considered that to travel by a democratic form of transport such as bus would not be safe for foreigners.

The travellers would have been glad to present plane tickets to the consul, but their meager resources wouldn't allow them. They had to find another way. The Argentines had a letter of recommendation from Salvador Allende, the leader of the Socialist Party of Chile, to a local socialist public figure and prominent lawyer in Guayaquil. The latter sent them free tickets on a United Fruit Company steamer sailing from Guayaquil to Panama. The "Green Monster" could afford from time to time to offer largesse to needy students and show its "good" heart....

Rojo kept up his efforts to convince Guevara to go to Guatemala with him. Influenced by these entreaties and perhaps by the newspaper releases about the imminent USA intervention against Arbenz, Che agreed to replace, at least temporarily, Venezuela by Guatemala, and wrote Mial a one-line note to inform him, which the reader has already seen.

In Panama the group split up: Rojo continued in the direction of Guatemala, but Guevara and Ferrer were held up—their money had ended. In order to make it at least to neighbouring Costa Rica Guevara sold all his books and then published articles on Machupicchu and other Peruvian antiquities in a local journal. Despite this their money remained limited. They set out for San José, the capital of Costa Rica, by hitch-hiking. On the way the truck in which Guevara was riding turned over during a tropical downpour. Ernesto emerged with an injured left arm and severely bruised legs. For a long time it was difficult for him to use this arm.

By early December Ernesto and his Argentine friend were wandering the streets of San José, the capital of the smallest (in terms of population) country in Latin America, then with around one million citizens. In terms of the political passions, however, this republic yielded to no other.

At that time political refugees from Central American and

Caribbean countries crowded San José. Here conspiracies, coups and revolutions were being planned, here preparations were made for expeditions of liberation, and here political plans, programmes and manifestos were debated. But matters never went farther than verbal battles over a bottle of whisky in the local cafés.

The president of Costa Rica at that time was José Figueres, an owner of coffee plantations who in 1948 led the revolt against the government of Teodoro Picado. He accused him of sympathies with communism. However, Figueres was not a reactionary of the usual stamp. His ideal was bourgeois democracy. He spoke out against dictatorships in Central America and the Caribbean Basin and supported various aspirants to power in these regions, many of whom were then living in San José. The same aim underlay the creation by Figueres of the so-called Caribbean Legion that included in its ranks adventure-seekers, political refugees and mercenaries. Among the participants in the Legion were Dominicans, Nicaraguans, Cubans, Guatemalans and Spanish Republicans from those who had emigrated to Latin America after Franco's victory.

Here in San José Guevara met the Dominican Juan Bosch. A talented writer, the author of vivid and true stories about the life of simple people, about the trials and tribulations of his country, Juan Bosch spent years wandering about Latin America and exposing the criminal tyrant Leónidas Trujillo who had turned his homeland, the Dominican Republic, into a medieval dungeon. Bosch entertained no illusions concerning the American imperialists, who had on a number of occasions sent in the marines to "restore order" and who fastidiously took care of their ally and fellow-believer, the "Caribbean jackal" Trujillo.

In San José Guevara met with Cubans, participants in the underground struggle against the dictator Batista.

Much later, in a conversation with a correspondent from the Cuban newspaper *El Mundo* Che told how he first took an interest in Cuba when he was 11 years old. At that time the great Cuban chess grand master José Raúl Capablanca came to Buenos Aires. The young Tete was a passionate chess player and it goes without saying that he worshipped Capablanca. For a long time this exhausted his interest in Cuba. It is possible that on the road from Buenos Aires to Bolivia Che read reports in the newspapers about an assault by a group of daredevils headed by



the young lawyer Fidel Castro on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. We write "it is possible", for Che himself never made mention of this. But even if he did read about this event in the papers it is unlikely that it held his attention for long. Clashes between youth and the police are a normal happening in Latin American countries. And how could he have thought at the time that it would be precisely Cuba, that sugar bin of the United States which Americans themselves unabashedly called "our colony", which would become the arena of revolutionary war and the first country in the Western Hemisphere to raise the banner of socialism, and that he was destined to play an outstanding role in these events?

Moreover the first Cubans whom he met in San José could tell him only about the defeat of Fidel Castro's fighters in the storming of Moncada, about the heroic death of many of them and the arrest of the survivors. Yes, these were brave men and true patriots. But they didn't have the strength necessary to take on Batista's forces who were armed to the teeth and backed by American imperialism. It was a common saying at the time that "nothing ever happens in Cuba", meaning that no change was possible there since the island was so closely bound to the northern giant.

In any case the public eye at the time was focused not on Cuba, where Fidel, his brother Raúl and others involved in the battle of Moncada now whiled their time away behind bars, but on Guatemala over which storm clouds were steadily thickening. The newspapers reported that in neighbouring Honduras all kinds of adventurers and criminals were gathering under the protection of the local dictator, a former lawyer in the hire of the United Fruit Company. They were versed in the trade of murder by specialists from the CIA preparing to overthrow Arbenz' government. At the head of the hirelings was the Guatemalan Lt. Colonel Castillo Armas, who had already in 1950 led an insurrection against Arbenz before fleeing to Honduras. Here he entered the service of the "Green Monster". Armas received \$150 thousand a month from the Americans to recruit and arm mercenaries. Preparations for the intervention were carried out openly and official circles in Washington cynically stated that these preparations met with their approval and received their support.

It was important to rush to Guatemala. At the close of 1953 Ernesto Guevara and a few other Argentines set out by bus from

San José to San Salvador, from where they made it hitch-hiking to the city of Guatemala, capital of the republic, on December 24.

This city is located 1,800 metres above sea level, higher than any other capital in Central America. Next to it are volcanic mountains and the city was destroyed by earthquakes a number of times. The predominant one-storey homes are drowned in an ocean of greenery. The parks are the home of numerous song-birds, among them the remarkable *tesontle* which resembles the sparrow but is known as the “bird of four hundred voices”. The symbol of Guatemala is also a bird—the *quetzal*—a tiny thing with a marvelous long tail and feathers all colours of the rainbow. The *quetzal* dies in captivity.

Guatemala city pleased Ernesto at first sight. The rarefied air reminded him of Alta Gracia. He had letters of recommendation to various Guatemalans. In addition he had a letter from an acquaintance in Lima to the Peruvian revolutionary Hilda Gadea. Hilda was a mestizo, in her veins ran both Spanish and Indian blood. She had graduated from the economic department of the University of San Marcos in Lima and was an activist in the left wing of the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), a party outlawed by the Peruvian dictator General Odria. Hilda worked in the State Institute for the Development of the National Economy. Like many other left-wing refugees Hilda supported the Arbenz government. Ernesto found Hilda in the Cervantes boarding house where political émigrés from a number of Latin American countries were living. This is where Ernesto settled in as well.

Hilda Gadea like Ernesto had traveled widely throughout Latin America. She loved art and considered herself a Marxist. Their common views and interests soon brought them close together.

Hilda Gadea has given us her recollections of the impression that the young Argentine doctor produced on her:

“Dr. Ernesto Guevara impressed me from the start with his intelligence, seriousness, his views and his knowledge of Marxism.... Being from a bourgeois family and qualified to practice as a physician he could easily have made a career for himself in his homeland, just as all specialists with a higher education do in our countries. However, he tried to work in the most backward districts and even offered his services free—in order to treat the common people. But his attitude to medicine pleased me most of

all. He spoke with indignation, stemming from what he had seen on his travels through Latin America, of the terrible anti-sanitary conditions and the poverty suffered by our peoples. I remember well how we discussed A. J. Cronin's novel *The Citadel* and other books touching upon the subject of the doctor's duty to the working people. Ernesto referred to these books when asserting that in our countries a doctor must not be a privileged specialist, he must not serve the upper classes or invent useless medicines for hypochondriacs. Of course, such a path could bring in a substantial income and personal success, but should that be the goal of the young and conscious specialists in our countries?

"Dr. Guevara believed that the medic must devote himself to improving the living conditions of the people at large. This inevitably led him to a condemnation of the systems of government prevailing in our countries which were exploited by oligarchies and in which interference of Yankee imperialism was more and more prominent."

Here Che also met Cuban émigrés and comrades of Fidel Castro. Among them were Antonio López Fernández, known as Nico, Mario Dalmaú and Darío López, all of whom were future members of the *Granma* expedition. They told Ernesto of the heroic struggle against the tyrant Batista. They hoped that the Guatemalan revolution would shift the balance of power in the Caribbean Basin to Batista's disadvantage and help them overthrow the hated dictator. The same hopes were nurtured by refugees who had fled to Guatemala from other countries ruled by tyrants, the henchmen of American imperialism.

It seemed that Ernesto had gained personal happiness and many like-minded friends while in Guatemala. But this was not enough for him. He strove to take part in the revolutionary process in Guatemala, to act and do something useful and necessary for the common people. After all, that was why he came here. But he didn't find the outlet he was searching for.

So, Ernesto Guevara came to Guatemala to join the revolution. But what kind of revolution was it? As we already pointed out, the government of Jacobo Arbenz had carried out certain measures to protect Guatemalan national interests. He pushed an agrarian reform through parliament, gained a twofold increase in wages for the workers of the United Fruit Company, expropriated 554 thousand hectares of latifundia holdings, among which 160 thousand hectares belonged to "Mamita Yunai", and he observed

democratic freedoms. These measures brought on the ire of American officials. The US President at the time was Dwight D. Eisenhower. His right hand, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was one of the shareholders in the United Fruit Company.

The US Government appointed the well-known expert of political intrigue John Peurifoy as Ambassador to Guatemala with the task of overthrowing Arbenz. Peurifoy had been Ambassador to Greece. There, according to Eisenhower, he had come to know communist tactics, and, while in Guatemala, he soon arrived at a definite conclusion concerning the nature of the Arbenz government.

What conclusion? After the overthrow of the Arbenz government he wrote:

"We cannot permit a Soviet republic to be established between Texas and the Panama Canal."

Soon after this the American reactionary press began to bait the "communist Arbenz government", "Guatemala—the Red Outpost in Central America," "The Caribbean Sea—a Communist Lake", with these and other inflammatory bold headlines American newspapers tried to convince the man on the street that Guatemala had "gone communist" and almost threatened the very existence of the powerful empire of the dollar.

High-placed officials in Washington began publicly to call for the overthrow of Arbenz. Ambassador John Peurifoy told *Time* magazine that:

"It seemed to me that the man [Arbenz] was thinking and talking like a communist, and this, if not expressed directly, could have an effect later on. I informed John Foster Dulles of this and he passed it on to President Eisenhower." The US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs asserted that the Guatemalan government lived on "salaries from the Kremlin" and was a "marionette of Moscow" and that the situation would be changed in the near future. The role of avenger was to be carried out by henchmen led by Castillo Armas, with whom Peurifoy kept in constant touch.

Was Arbenz' government in reality "communist"? By no means. Arbenz was a career soldier who had distinguished himself at the military academy even under the tyrant Jorge Ubico—nicknamed the "Little Napoleon of the Caribbean Sea". Taking part in the military coup which in 1944 overthrew Ubico, Arbenz next occupied the post of Minister of War in the liberal

government of Juan José Arévalo. In 1945 President Arévalo established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, but no Soviet Embassy was established under either Arévalo or Arbenz.

Colonel Arbenz was elected President of Guatemala in the autumn of 1950. He received 267 thousand votes and his opponents all told—140 thousand. Arbenz was supported by the bourgeois-democratic parties taking a position of national independence, and by the young Guatemalan Labour Party (Communist). But this latter Party had very limited influence. It was formed as late as 1949 and had in its ranks but a few hundred members. In the national Congress it had only 4 out of a total of 56 deputies.

The Arbenz government was progressive but bourgeois with all the accompanying vacillations and indecisiveness, and it included some flagrantly conservative elements.

It should come as no surprise that in these conditions it was difficult if not impossible for the young Argentine doctor with openly Marxist views to set himself up in Guatemala.

Ernesto offered his services to the Ministry of Health, requesting to be sent to the most remote region of Guatemala, Petén Jungle, to work as a doctor among the Indian communities. He was ready to do any other job of use to the revolution. However, the government officials responded to the young Argentine's offer with noticeable lack of enthusiasm. They demanded that he first confirm his certificate to practice medicine, a complicated procedure which would have required no less than a year.

At the same time, it was necessary to earn money for at least minimal subsistence. Ernesto worked at odd jobs, wrote observations in the local press and hawked books. Hilda joked that he was reading more than selling. He cooperated with the Patriotic Working Youth, the youth organisation of the Guatemalan Labour Party. With a knapsack on his back he travelled about the country studying the ancient culture of the Maya Indians.

All of his friends at the time observed that he was a tireless debator. The chief subject of argument with his friends was the choice of means and of forces with which the Latin American countries could be liberated from the yoke of imperialism, exploitation and poverty. Young people, his friends, yearned for change and for struggle. They argued themselves hoarse over the class struggle, the necessity of agrarian reform, the role of the working class, and about socialism, communism, Marxism and Leninism.

As distinct from certain of his friends at the time Ernesto Guevara did not limit himself to argument but read Marxist literature voraciously. "At that time," recalls the Cuban revolutionary Mario Dalmaú, who befriended Che in Guatemala, "he had already developed a fairly clear Marxist viewpoint. He had absorbed the writings of Marx and Lenin and read through volumes of Marxist literature."

Ernesto was very disturbed with the course of events in Guatemala. The country was crawling with American agents and saboteurs. In one village Ernesto met up with the renowned American "specialist" on communism in Latin America professor Robert Alexander.

"Many gringos, many indeed!" said Che to his companion. "What do you think, what are they up to here? They pretend to be conducting research, but in fact they are spying at the instruction of the American secret service."

The American Government was preparing to put a straight jacket on recalcitrant Guatemala. In March 1954, at the insistence of Washington the Tenth Inter-American Conference was convened in Caracas and J. F. Dulles gave a speech accusing Guatemala of being communist. Under pressure from Dulles the conference, despite the resistance of a number of Latin American governments, adopted an anti-communist resolution, virtually sanctioning the intervention against Guatemala.

Arbenz categorically denied any connection with communism or Communists. He also categorically and truthfully denied any ties whatsoever with the Soviet Union. On March 1, 1954, Arbenz wrote in a message to the Guatemalan Congress: "It should be clear even to the most unperceptive viewer that the Soviet Union has not interfered in our country's affairs and does not threaten us with any form of intervention."

But Arbenz was not anti-communist, nor anti-Soviet and it was this that aroused the ire of the Washington bosses. The sardine dared to cross the shark! A banana republic dared to challenge Uncle Sam! It was an unheard-of violation of the sacred Monroe Doctrine, how else could the behaviour of the Arbenz government be described? Convinced that the application of economic sanctions accompanied by threats had produced no effect on Arbenz, Washington decided to unleash its pack of hounds against him.

On June 17, 1954, the Armas gangs armed and drilled by American intelligence agents left Honduras to invade Guatemala-

lan territory and occupied a number of border settlements. Shootings of supporters of the Arbenz government began. The planes of the invaders started bombing the capital and other strategic points in the country.

The intervention forces numbered only 800 mercenaries, of whom 200 were Guatemalans and the remainder foreigners. At the time, the Arbenz government had at its disposal 6 or 7 thousand troops. Nevertheless at the initial stage of the invasion the government troops declined to fight the mercenaries and instead retreated towards the centre of the country.

President Arbenz hoped to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict. He sent a complaint to the United Nations Security Council demanding the immediate withdrawal of the invading troops. Guatemala's complaint was supported in the Security Council by the USSR. The Soviet representative declared: "Guatemala has been subjected to armed attack from land, sea and air. Before us we have an instance of obvious and overt aggression: an attack against one of the states of Central America—Guatemala—a member of the United Nations. Therefore the duty and obligation of the Security Council consist in taking immediate measures to halt the aggression and the Security Council must not renege upon this obligation, and no other body can replace the Security Council on this question." Despite the insistent demands of Guatemala and the Soviet Union, the Security Council took no effective measures to halt the aggression.

Meanwhile the working people of Guatemala appealed to the government to take decisive measures against the mercenaries. They demanded weapons, the organisation of a home guard and the mobilisation of the people for the defence of the republic. The government refused to arm the people, although bowing to popular pressure it ordered the army to drive the enemy from the country's territories. The Guatemalan army moved to the offensive and crushed the mercenaries, the remnants of whom fled in panic to Honduras.

This turn of events caused consternation in Washington. The aggression organised by the CIA, the Pentagon and the State Department against democratic Guatemala threatened to collapse, and the American Establishment does not forgive its servitors such failures. This point was driven home by commentaries on events in Guatemala in the *New York Herald Tribune* which

remarked that the army of the Guatemala Government, six thousand strong, had been trained along US lines. Therefore, if it defeated the anti-communist Armas it would be thanks to the US Secretary of Defence. The Pentagon, keeping a military mission with a communist-influenced government, now realised the irony of the situation. The American advisers would be recalled, the paper predicted, if the insurgents were defeated.

The patrons of Armas in Washington took the hint. Seeing that the hopes they had placed in the mercenaries had not been justified, they began feverish preparations for a military coup to overthrow Arbenz, employing to this end their agents who had earlier been functioning in the role of supporters of the President. The key figure in this operation was Peurifoy. It was he who drew up the ultimatum which high ranking military figures sent to Arbenz. They demanded his resignation, threatening to overthrow him if he refused. To conceal their designs the conspirators promised to respect the "life and freedom of all citizens" and to continue the struggle against the mercenaries. Arbenz could not withstand the pressure and without even asking the opinion of the parties supporting him resigned as president on June 27, 1954. He turned over power to the head of the Guatemalan armed forces, Colonel Díaz, and sought asylum in the Mexican Embassy. Soon afterward he left the country. Díaz' first act was to outlaw the Guatemalan Labour Party and arrest its leaders, then to turn the reins of government over to Peurifoy's hireling Colonel Monzon. The latter gave in to Castillo Armas, who at the head of his men once again marched into Guatemala. A few days later, welcomed by reactionaries of all stripes including the local archbishop and Peurifoy, the newly fashioned dictator entered the capital triumphantly, where mass executions of the supporters of the former president had already begun.

During these sombre times what did Ernesto Guevara do for Guatemala? Like all opponents of American imperialism he was burning with the desire to take up arms and fight in the defence of the Arbenz regime. He called for the creation of a home guard and the arming of the working people, he stood in support of decisive measures against the reactionaries who planned the coup. But his calls, like those of other sober-minded people, fell upon deaf ears. Arbenz hoped that he could cope with the mercenaries through his armed forces alone; he believed in the loyalty of the officer corps.



“Ernesto,” recalled Hilda, “asked to be sent into the region of fighting, but no one paid any attention to him. Then he joined anti-air defence groups helping them during the air-raids and transporting weaponry....”

Ernesto did not retreat from any type of work. “Together with members of the Patriotic Working Youth,” testified Mario Dalmaú, “he went patrolling in the middle of fires and bomb explosions, subjecting himself to mortal danger.”

This young Argentine, appealing to the Guatemalans to resist American imperialism, could not but come to the attention of CIA agents following the development of events in the Guatemalan capital. The American secret service entered him in a list of “dangerous communists” to be liquidated immediately upon the overthrow of Arbenz. The Argentine Ambassador, learning of this, rushed to the Cervantes boarding home to warn his compatriot about the danger and offer him asylum in the embassy. When Castillo Armas entered Guatemala Ernesto moved to the Argentine Embassy where not only his countrymen but Cubans and a few Guatemalans sympathising with Arbenz found refuge. This crowd divided into two groups: “democrats” and “communists”. Ernesto without hesitation sided with the latter although he was not a member of a Communist Party.

The Argentine Ambassador suggested that Ernesto return to Argentina at official expense. But Guevara had not the slightest desire to return. He thought it better to travel to Mexico where many of his Cuban and other Latin American friends had already gone, ready to continue their struggle and retaining hope of victory in another place. As long as there remained such hotbloods believing that the impossible could be done, all was not yet lost.

The Guatemalan events left a deep impression on Che’s mind; he matured politically during those numbered days when the fate of the Arbenz Government was being decided. He was given more than ample proof that the chief enemy, and a cruel and insidious one, was American imperialism, that it employed anti-communism and anti-Sovietism to conceal its own criminal moves, that the CIA and Pentagon had at their disposal a reliable network of agents in army circles, that an authentic people’s revolution must smash this machine and replace it with a people’s army and that, finally, it was necessary to arm the people, for only people

prepared for combat could hope for success in the struggle against imperialism.

Che's evolution did not pass by the American agents unnoticed. Later, when the American secret service began to compile a dossier on Fidel Castro's men then fighting in the hills of the Sierra Maestra it was quite clear to them that they had in the person of Che Guevara a revolutionary with "Guatemalan experience".

In April 1958 the Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti visited Fidel Castro's fighters in the Sierra Maestra. He interviewed Che among others. Masetti asked his compatriot about the truth of the rumours that the insurgents were Communists. Che answered:

"It is to me that the Americans above all ascribe communism. Not a single American journalist who has journeyed to the mountains has failed to ask me about my activities in the ranks of the Guatemalan Communist Party. They all think the question settled—that I was a member of the Communist Party of that country—simply because I was and remain a firm supporter of the democratic government of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz."

"Did you hold a position in the government?" Masetti continued his pointed questioning.

"None whatsoever. But when the North American incursion began I tried to get together a group of young people like me to strike a blow at the 'fruit adventurers'. It was necessary to fight in Guatemala but almost no one fought. It was urgent to resist but almost no one wanted to do so."

After the victory of the Cuban Revolution Che both in letters and speeches often recalled his "Guatemalan period". In one such speech in 1960 Che said:

"After long wanderings, finding myself in Guatemala, the Guatemala of Arbenz, I tried to make a number of observations in order to work out the pattern of behaviour for a revolutionary doctor. I tried to figure out what was imperative in order to become a revolutionary doctor. But then the aggression began, an aggression unleashed by the United Fruit, the State Department, John Foster Dulles—they can all be lumped together—and their puppet who was called Castillo Armas. Was called, I say—in the past tense!<sup>1</sup> The aggression succeeded because the Guatemalan

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<sup>1</sup> Armas was killed in 1955 by one of his bodyguards.

people had not yet reached the degree of maturity now attained by the Cuban people, and one fine day I left, or more correctly, fled from Guatemala.... It was then I understood what was the key: in order to become a revolutionary doctor, you first need a revolution. Isolated individual efforts, or purity of ideals, or the striving to give one's life in the name of even the noblest of ideals, or solitary struggle in some remote part of Latin America against hostile governments and social conditions obstructing progress—are worth nothing. In order to make a revolution it is necessary to have that which exists in Cuba: the mobilisation of the entire people, who, using weapons and the experience of united action attained in struggle, would learn the meaning of weapons and of national unity."

Is it only a revolutionary doctor who needs the people's support? By no means. Any fighter for the happiness of the people can make progress only if he takes part in the struggle of the entire people and if he works for the unity of action of all forces in opposition to imperialism and all types of oppression. In this very same year Che wrote to one of his correspondents in the USA: "My experience in Arbenz' Guatemala, which stood firm against colonialism but which became a victim of aggression by the North American monopolies, led me to one essential conclusion: in order to be a revolutionary, you need the existence of a revolution."

The Bolivian revolution got stuck half-way, the Guatemalan revolution went down in defeat, but the real revolution was still in the future, and coming closer every day....

## The "Granma"

**I met Fidel Castro one chilly Mexican night, and I recall that our first conversation was about international politics. The very same night, just a few hours later at dawn, I had already become a participant in the forthcoming expedition.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

The Argentine Ambassador in Guatemala, having managed not without difficulty to gain permission from the new authorities for Che to leave, then persuaded his Mexican colleague to give his

ward a visa and bought him a train ticket to Mexico. He took him to the suburban station and escorted him to the train.

This train moved as slowly as had the milk train which brought him to La Paz a year ago. It pushed on deliberately as if hacking through the dense tropical underbrush, now approaching the Pacific coast, then moving away from it. At the empty stations military patrols kept guard, a reminder that the country was under military rule.

What did Che think when he saw these patrols? Possibly about the fact that once again the American imperialists, using their local puppets, had emerged victorious. How many times had this happened in the banana republics, how much of the people's blood had been spilled by these tyrants?!

But still.... Despite what seemed to be an unending chain of failures, defeats, betrayals and disillusionments, just let a little time pass and that same people whose blood had recently flowed, who had been virtually drawn and quartered would once again hurl itself at its eternal enemy only to be cruelly suppressed once again. In this people there must be hidden an inexhaustible wellspring of revolution, which inevitably, despite a thousand defeats, will lead to victory. The people can win earlier if it has wise and able leaders. Arbenz was going in the right direction, but demonstrated his weakness in the day of trial, so his government collapsed like a deck of cards.

Che's thoughts were interrupted by a timid knock on the door. A tiny figure entered the compartment, more like a child than a man, holding a small suitcase in his hand. He introduced himself:

"Julio Roberto Cáceres Valle, at your service!"

Not a half-hour had passed when the companion told his simple story. A rookie journalist and member of the Guatemalan Labour Party, he was heading for Mexico to escape persecution.

"Call me Patojo," he told Che, "in Guatemala it means Tom Thumb."

Patojo, a few years younger than Che, became one of his closest friends, second only after Alberto Granados. Patojo was a Communist and hence an optimist. Despite the defeat he believed in the eventual triumph of his ideas.

In an article written on Patojo's death in the mountains of Guatemala, where he had returned after the victory of the Cuban Revolution to fight with weapon in hand for his country's freedom,

Che wrote of him as a staunch Communist, intelligent, sensitive and observant, and noted that the Guatemalan events had taught him a lot. "Revolution," wrote Che, "cleanses people, it improves them just as an experienced peasant corrects defects in his plants and ensures high quality."

Patojo, like Che, loved poetry and wrote verse and this brought them closer too. In the article mentioned above Che described how before Patojo left Cuba he gave Che his poetry. Che cited a verse written by Patojo to his girlfriend:

*Take it, it's nothing more than my heart,  
hold it in your hand  
so that when the day has come  
you'll open up your hand  
that the sun may bring warmth to it....*

On September 21, 1954, Che and Patojo arrived in Mexico City, a huge and unfamiliar city where neither of them had any friends or even acquaintances.

Che and Patojo made friends, quite by accident, with Puerto Rican émigrés. They were looking for a place to settle and someone gave them the address of Juan Juarbe, a Puerto Rican, who let them a modest room. Juan Juarbe turned out to be an important figure in the Nationalist Party which advocated independence for Puerto Rico, an island occupied by the Yankees in 1898 and transformed into a colony. Trying to attract public attention to the destitute situation of Puerto Ricans, members of the Nationalist Party opened fire at one of the sessions of Congress in Washington. The Party was declared illegal in Puerto Rico and the United States. Its leader Albizu Campos was sentenced to a long term in a hard-labour prison in the USA.

The Puerto Rican revolutionaries could not but attract the sympathy of the Argentine. Although they were but a handful, they had nevertheless dared to challenge the mightiest imperialist power in the world, to declare war against it, for they were ready at any time to suffer a martyr's death. Their burning faith in their cause, their idealism, courage, honesty, fanaticism in the face of the complete futility of hoping for any progress at the time evoked his admiration. Che was also sympathetic because these were people concerned with revolutionary actions rather than mere idle talk. At least they weren't sheep, being led humbly to the slaugh-

ter, but true men ready if necessary to fight with weapon in hand for their freedom.

Yet another political refugee lived in Juan Juarbe's apartment, a young Peruvian named Lucho (Luis) de la Puente, completely caught up in hopes for revolution in his homeland. An inveterate opponent of Colonel Odría, at the time dictator of Peru, Lucho dreamed of leading the Indian people to struggle for their social liberation. Later he would be a supporter of the Cuban Revolution and head a guerrilla unit in one of Peru's mountain regions until killed on October 23, 1965, in battle with "Rangers" specially trained by American agents for anti-guerrilla warfare.

Juarbe's family was generous but lived in semi-starvation.

To be sure, this is not of central importance for the young.

"We were flat broke at the time," wrote Che, "Patojo's pockets were empty and all I had was a few pesos. I bought a camera and we did contraband photography in the parks. A Mexican who owned a small developing laboratory helped us print our pictures. We came to know Mexico City, walking its every street in search of customers for our miserable pictures. How many times we had to cajole and flatter that a child was so cute that the parent just had to pay a peso to immortalise such a face. We got by for a few months on this trade. Little by little things got better...."

Che wrote an article entitled "Eyewitness to the Overthrow of Arbenz", but he couldn't find work as a journalist.

Meanwhile, Hilda arrived from Guatemala and they got married. Now Che had to think about her as well, so he began to look for work. Once again he began to hawk books for a local publishing house, *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, dealing in a wide range of literature on social problems. But as a book-seller Che was a flop: he spent more time arguing about them with the publishers than hawking them.

He continued to be fascinated with books. In order to get his hands on new editions he once took a job as a night watchman at a book exhibition where he consumed one book after another. Finally he succeeded in beating his rivals for a place in the allergy ward of the local hospital. For some time he gave lectures at the medical department of the National University, then switched over to scientific research in the Institute of Cardiology. He gained access to the laboratory in the French hospital where he conducted experiments on cats which he bought up from an old lady for a peso each.

The political climate then predominant in Mexico did not particularly encourage Che. The Mexican Revolution of the second decade of the century which had overthrown the reactionary dictator Porfirio Díaz, had long ago faded away. The so-called new bourgeoisie, eager for profit, had come to power. They opened wide the country's gates for the influx of American capital, concealing their actions with pseudo-revolutionary demagoguery. The forces of the left were divided and schismatic. The Communist Party, subjected to constant persecution, did not have sufficient strength to unite all progressive forces in the country into a powerful anti-imperialist revolutionary movement.

Che fell in love with Mexico, her working people, artists and poets, her ancient Indian culture, her wild and picturesque land, her clean and transparent alpine air—the best medicine against the asthma which continued to torment him.

On February 15, 1956, Hilda gave birth to a baby girl who was given her mother's name. "When my daughter was born in Mexico City," said Che in an interview with a correspondent from the Mexican journal *Siempre* in 1959, "we could register her as a Peruvian or Argentine. Either would have been logical, for we were transients in Mexico. Nevertheless my wife and I decided to register her as a Mexican in homage and respect to the people who had sheltered us in our bitter hour of defeat and exile."

In Mexico Che met Raúl Roa, the Cuban writer and publicist and opponent of Batista. After Batista was overthrown he became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Raúl Roa recalls of his meeting with Guevara: "I made his acquaintance one night in the home of his compatriot Ricardo Rojo. He had just arrived from Guatemala, where for the first time he had taken part in a revolutionary and anti-imperialist movement. He was still deeply wounded by the defeat.

"Che seemed and was young. His image fixed itself in my memory: a clear mind, ascetic paleness, asthmatic breathing, a prominent forehead, a thick head of hair, firm judgements, energetic jaw, calm movements, a sensitive, penetrating glance, a quick wit, a quiet tone and a resonant voice....

"He had only just begun work in the allergy ward of the Institute of Cardiology. We talked about Argentina, Guatemala and Cuba, looking at their problems through the prism of Latin America. Already at that time Che had risen above the level of

narrow Creole nationalism and argued from the position of a continental revolutionary.”

This Argentine doctor, as distinct from many other émigrés concerned only with the problems of the homeland, thought not so much about Argentina as about Latin America as a whole, trying to detect its “weakest link”. It was also clear that at the time of his meeting with Roa, Che did not consider Cuba to be this link, although he was well up on political events in that country.

In order for Cuba to draw his attention more than any other Latin American country, he needed to meet with militant men, with those who bypassed fruitless arguments and called for immediate action. His starting point was his acquaintance with Raúl Castro and then with Fidel.

At the close of June 1955 two Cubans arrived at the hospital to make an appointment with a doctor. The doctor on duty was Ernesto Guevara. Che recognised one of them to be Nico López, his friend from the Guatemalan period. Both were overjoyed at the unexpected meeting. Nico told Che that his comrades in the attack on the Moncada barracks had been freed by amnesty and were gathering in Mexico City. They intended to put together an armed expedition to Cuba. Now, this looked like the real thing! Che expressed an interest and Nico offered to introduce him to Raúl Castro.

The meeting with Raúl took place a few days later. He told Che of the Moncada episode, about the cruel slaughter inflicted by Batista’s men in arms, about the trial of his brother Fidel, about the latter’s speech in court, which later became known under the title “History Will Vindicate Me”, about their misadventures in the hard-labour prison on the Isle of Pines and, finally, about their firm determination to continue the struggle against the tyrant Batista.

What was his impression? Somewhat later Che said of Raúl: “It seemed to me that he didn’t resemble the others. At least he talked better and was clearly a thinker.”

Raúl was also pleased with his interlocutor. He immediately sized him up as a person who could be of use on the planned expedition. Che had the “Guatemalan experience” behind him and was a doctor. They agreed that Raúl would introduce him to Fidel, whose arrival from New York was expected in the immediate future.



In the United States Fidel was collecting money from Cuban emigrants to finance the planned expedition. Speaking in New York at a meeting held against Batista, Fidel said: "I can tell you that in 1956 we shall obtain freedom or become martyrs."

What did the hopes of the young Cuban patriot rest on? First of all on his own people, who hated Batista, on its courage and decisiveness, which had been demonstrated many times over during its entire history. Was it not true that in the 19th century the Cubans fought almost 50 years to gain their independence? Had they not overthrown the hated dictator Machado in 1933? And now, too, Batista was running amok: this meant he feared the people.

Fidel also counted on the support of his followers, participants in and sympathisers with the July 26 Movement (the day of the attack on the Moncada barracks) he had founded. These were basically students, young workers, office employees, craftsmen and senior pupils in the high schools. They lacked political experience and even had no clear programme, but they did have another valuable quality: love for their country and hatred of Batista.

For these young people Fidel was a true hero. Like his followers he was young. He was a talented speaker, had a striking appearance, was madly courageous and possessed an iron will. He was well versed in Cuba's history and could make his way unerringly through the maze that was contemporary Cuban politics. He knew which evils had to be combated and spoke of them with firm conviction in his speech "History Will Vindicate Me" before the court.

They met in the home of María Antonia González at 49, Amparan Street. María Antonia was a Cuban married to a Mexican and she was in deep sympathy with the young patriots. One of her brothers, Isidoro, a participant in the underground struggle against Batista, had been subjected to barbaric tortures in the tyrant's cells. Soon after emigrating to Mexico he died. María Antonia offered her modest apartment to Fidel's adherents who turned it into their headquarters. They not only ate at her table but lived in the apartment as well. The place was strewn with mattresses, folding beds, all kinds of literature, and even weapons. A whole system of signs and passwords was worked out for the visitors. A neighbouring storekeeper and friend of María Antonia would signal the arrival of the conspirators.

As chance had it Fidel arrived in Mexico City on July 9, 1955, the anniversary of Argentina's independence. Raul told him about the young Argentine doctor who had taken part in the events in Guatemala and advised Fidel to look him over.

What did Fidel and Che talk about during their first meeting? According to Che the conversation centered upon international politics. Fidel, of course, acquainted Che with his plans and political programme.

"We shall begin our military operations in Oriente", Fidel told his new friend. "Oriente is the most militant, patriotic and revolutionary of all Cuban provinces, and it's where I have the most supporters and friends. This is where we tried to capture the Moncada barracks. It was in Oriente that the battle for independence began, and it was the residents of this province who spilled the most blood, made the greatest sacrifice and showed the most heroism.... The atmosphere of this heroic epoch can still be sensed in Oriente. At dawn when the roosters crow waking the soldiers as if during reveille and when the sun rises over the pine-covered mountains, it's as if the days of Yara and Baire were coming back."<sup>1</sup>

Fidel noted later that during their meeting Che "had more mature revolutionary views than I. In terms of ideology and theory he was more advanced. Compared to me he was a more advanced revolutionary."

Che later described the impression that Fidel had produced on him during that first meeting:

"I talked with Fidel throughout the night. By morning I was already enlisted as a doctor in the forthcoming expedition. As a matter of fact, after what I experienced during my wanderings through Latin America ending with the events in Guatemala, it wouldn't have taken much to convince me to take part in a revolution against any tyrant. In addition, Fidel impressed me as an extraordinary person. He was capable of resolving the most complex problems and had a deep faith and conviction that setting out for Cuba he would reach the island, that having reached it he would begin the struggle, and that once it was begun, victory was inevitable. I was caught up in his enthusiasm. It was necessary to take action, enact concrete measures, struggle. The time had come to stop complaining and begin to move."

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<sup>1</sup> Yara and Baire were the two cities where the war of independence began.

However at the start Che's optimism was well seasoned with a strong dose of scepticism. "Victory," Che recalled after the overthrow of Batista, "seemed doubtful when I first made the acquaintance of the commander of the insurgents, to whom I was drawn by love of adventure. At the time I thought that it wouldn't be so bad to die on the beaches of another country in the name of such elevated ideals."

What ideals was Che talking about? We can find the answer to this question in Che's "Song in Honour of Fidel" written soon after his first meeting with the leader of the July 26 Movement and published after the author's death. The following two stanzas are the most outstanding in the poem:

*When your voice resounds in all directions—  
"Agrarian Reform, Justice, Bread and Freedom!"—  
There at your side, repeating your call,  
you will find us.*

*The day when the monster is licking its flank  
where the sharp lance of nationalisation has plunged,  
there at your side, with our hearts proud and loyal,  
you will find us.*

The first stanza speaks of the necessity of agrarian reform, which Fidel first mentioned during his speech in the court. The second points to the nationalisation of the property held by the American imperialists.

A short time after the meeting between Che and Fidel a military coup took place in Argentina. Perón was overthrown and fled abroad. The new authorities declared that émigré opponents of Perón could return to Buenos Aires. Rojo and other Argentines living in Mexico City began to make preparations to return home. They tried to talk Che into doing the same but he refused. He did not believe in the possibility of fundamental changes in Argentina in the prevailing conditions. Now all of his thoughts were directed on the forthcoming expedition to Cuba.

In the meantime, however, this expedition existed only on paper. The actual enactment would require an enormous amount of work: collecting money (a lot of money), gathering in Mexico the future participants, providing them with food, checking them up and disguising them. The unit had to be prepared for guerrilla

activities. Arms and a ship had to be obtained. Support had to be organised for the unit once on the island. There were a thousand other details, both big and small. Moreover, everything had to be carried out in total secrecy and kept from the ears of Batista's detectives and from the agents of the Dominican tyrant Trujillo, who feared that a successful uprising against Batista might spread to his domain.

At first glance the entire attempt to organise an expedition in a foreign country might seem a foolhardy undertaking. But not for the Cubans, not for the residents of the Antilles or Central America. In the nineteenth century during the struggle for independence the Cuban patriots organised such an expedition, relying on the United States, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Mexico. In the 1940s a number of armed expeditions were undertaken from Guatemala against the tyrant Trujillo. Opponents of the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza made an incursion into this country from Costa Rica. Opponents of the Venezuelan tyrant Gómez organised insurrectionary expeditions against him from the island of Trinidad. In all these expeditions Latin Americans from other countries took part, and not only adventure-seekers but also people struggling for progressive ideals.

The fact that Fidel carried out his preparations in Mexico and the involvement of the Argentine Guevara was quite logical, so to speak, in the spirit of the old tradition.

It seems that the landing of a unit not far from Santiago was timed to coincide with an uprising to seize power in the city led by Frank País, a young conspirator and associate of Fidel. It was hoped that this would bring about the collapse of Batista.

Apparently during the preparations in Mexico for the expedition it was not foreseen that the base area for the insurgents might be the Sierra Maestra. But the possibility of a protracted guerrilla war was not excluded, and the future insurgents had to be trained accordingly.

Consequently, it was imperative to find a specialist in guerrilla warfare who would teach the men of the unit. The soldiers had to be taught the tactics of the guerrilla and all its ways and means and be prepared for the hardships accompanying such a life.

María Antonia introduced Fidel to a friend of the family, the Mexican Arsacio Vanegas Arroyo, the owner of a small printing press. He began to run off paper money, manifestos and other documents for the members of the July 26 Movement. Arsacio

also turned out to be a wrestler. Learning about this Fidel suggested that he take on the physical training of the future participants in the *Granma* Expedition, and he did not object. Arsacio began to go on long hikes with the Cubans in the nearby hills, taught them judo, and rented a hall in which they could practice track and field. "Moreover," recalls Arsacio, "the group took courses in geography, history, the contemporary political situation and other subjects. Sometimes I myself remained to hear the lectures. They also went to the cinema to watch war films."

But Arsacio, though a very helpful person, could not give them what they needed most. All he knew about guerrilla warfare was what his grandfather had told him about the exploits of Pancho Villa.

Fidel found the necessary specialist in a former colonel of the Spanish army, Alberto Bayo. The Colonel was a colourful personality. Born in 1892 of a Spanish family in Cuba, in childhood he left with his family for Spain. Later he completed a military academy, fought in Morocco, served in the Foreign Legion, then became a pilot. Don Alberto was a writer as well; he wrote verse and tales of soldier's life. When the civil war began Bayo took the side of the people and fought bravely against the Francoists. He took part in the landing on the island of Mallorca which had been seized by Franco's mutineers, and he was in charge of the instruction of partisan groups and units. After the fall of the Republic Bayo first emigrated to his place of birth, Cuba, where he opened a private school of mathematics. Soon, however, he moved to Mexico and, adopting Mexican citizenship, became the owner of a furniture factory. He served as an instructor in a combat aviation school and from time to time took part as a "qualified specialist" in attempts to overthrow various dictators of one or another banana republic in Central America. In 1955 Bayo published in Mexico a rather unique textbook entitled *One Hundred and Fifty Questions to the Guerrillero*. This work was a kind of handbook of guerrilla warfare. One could learn from it not only how to lay an ambush, blow up a bridge, make hand bombs or other devices, but also how to dig an escape tunnel, how to operate and fly an airplane and even how to whistle imitatively! In brief, it was a veritable partisan bible.

It goes without saying that such a specialist was a real find for the future insurgents. It did not take Fidel Castro much effort to convince the colonel, poet, aviator, and expert in guerrilla warfare

and sabotage, to take on the task of training the aspiring liberators of their common homeland from Batista's tyranny.

To be sure, at first Bayo demanded, for the sake of respectability, 100 thousand Mexican pesos (about US \$8,000) for his services, then agreed to half the sum. As things turned out, however, Bayo not only took not a penny from his young friends, but even sold his furniture factory and turned over the money to his students: he had no doubt in their victory!

Passing himself off as a Salvadorian political émigré, Bayo soon bought an hacienda for US \$26,000 from a certain Erasmo Rivera, a former soldier in Pancho Villa's partisan army. The place was called Santa Rosa and located in a hilly area overgrown with wild shrubs 35 kilometres from the capital. The members of Fidel's unit, including Ernesto Guevara, set up a new base there.

Fidel put Che "in charge of the cadres" in Colonel Bayo's "university" which in substance made him the leader of this guerrilla camp of sorts.

The training of the future fighters was stepped up. Bayo, whom they called "professor of English" for security reasons, was inexhaustible, insistent and stern with his charges. He demanded of them the utmost discipline, physical stamina, restraint from alcohol and what amounted to almost a monastic way of life. Bayo trained his pupils from dawn to dusk, teaching them how to fire, read maps, use camouflage and move stealthily, prepare explosives, hurl grenades and carry out patrols. He loaded them with weapons, knapsacks and tents, and took them on long and tiring marches in all kinds of weather and at different times of the day.

Che studied the science of guerrilla warfare with profound seriousness and a deep sense of responsibility. As he wrote later, all his doubts of victory disappeared with the first lessons. Che was a model of discipline and excelled in carrying out the tasks assigned by the "professor of English". The latter took to marking his students. Che always got the highest, mark 10. The former colonel in the Spanish Republican Army called him his "most able student".

Che taught while he was learning. As the unit's doctor he taught them how to set a fracture, dress a wound and give an injection. He even used himself as the guinea pig for his instructions. During the course of "lab" studies he got more than 100 injections—one or more from each of his students.

At Santa Rosa Che was also the political commissar. The Cuban Carlos Bermudez later recalled: "Studying with him at the Santa Rosa ranch I learned what kind of man he was—always the most diligent, displaying the highest sense of responsibility, ready to help each of us.... I met him when he stopped the flow of blood after I had a tooth removed. At the time I was just barely literate. He told me: 'I'll teach you how to read and understand what you've read....'" Another student, Darío López, wrote in his reminiscences: "Che himself chose Marxist literature for the library for our political studies."

Fidel Castro appeared rarely at Santa Rosa. He was up to his neck in preparations for the expedition, collecting money and weapons, sending messengers to Cuba and receiving them, negotiating with various other groups in opposition to Batista, writing articles, appeals, instructions.

Preparations proceeded at full speed. Bayo was pleased with his insurgents and promised to complete the course of instruction by the middle of 1956. In Cuba Batista continued his atrocities. The police subjected the opposition to horrifying tortures and threw the mutilated bodies into the streets or the ocean. The dictator broke off diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, closed down the Cuban-Soviet Friendship Society, drove into the underground the *Partido Socialista Popular*—the party of Cuban Communists, and put the trade unions under the control of gangsters in the hire of the entrepreneurs. American capitalists operated in the country, American officers in the army and the CIA in the police. Cuba was flooded with anti-communist and anti-Soviet literature. It had truly been turned into a Yankee colony. It shouldn't come as a surprise that the then Vice-President of the USA proclaimed Batista a reliable defender of "freedom and democracy" because of his "marvellous" deeds or that the US Ambassador A. Gardner without hesitation described the dictator—well-known as an embezzler of state property and taker of bribes—as "the most honest man" in the political arena in Cuba.

But the Cuban people were anything but despondent. Cuban working people, intellectuals, university and high-school students joined in the struggle against the tyrant and his American protectors. Underground press exposed Batista's crimes. Meetings, demonstrations and strikes against the regime increased in frequency. The dictator was forced to close down all institutions of

higher education in the country. Through bribery, blackmail and threats he tried to win the support of the bourgeois opposition leaders. He flirted with the church. He arranged for the construction of a monumental statue of Christ at the entrance to Havana Harbour. In his speeches he talked of progress, prosperity, patriotism, and had the nerve to make references to José Martí, the great patriot who gave his life in the struggle for independence. But barbaric terror, social demagoguery, political intrigue, laudatory hymns in his honour by American senators and the blessings of the Cuban cardinal Arteaga and other Catholic dignitaries were ineffective in keeping down the growing movement against the former sergeant and now general and self-proclaimed President of Cuba Fulgencio Batista.

Fidel was aware of this and did everything in his power to hasten his preparations for the expedition.

But agents of Batista and the CIA were not idle either. On June 22, 1956, Mexican secret police arrested Fidel Castro on one of the streets of the capital, then broke into María Antonia's apartment, set up a trap and arrested everyone who entered. A raid was organised against the Santa Rosa ranch as well, where police succeeded in seizing Che and several of his comrades. The press shouted in bold headlines about the arrest of Cuban conspirators. Of course Colonel Bayo's name, this "professor of guerrilla warfare", was dragged in as well.<sup>1</sup>

The Cuban newspapers, genuflecting before the tyrant, alleged that the Mexican police had proof that Fidel Castro was not only a member of the Communist Party but the secret leader of the Mexican-Soviet Cultural Institute.

It later became clear that one of Batista's spies, a certain Venerio, had penetrated the ranks of the conspirators. The arrests were the result of his efforts.

On June 26, the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* published a list of those arrested, among them figured the name of Ernesto Guevara Serna. The newspaper described him as a dangerous "international communist agitator" who had earlier functioned in Guatemala under Arbenz as what amounted to almost an "agent of Moscow".

"After being arrested we were brought to the Miguel Schulz

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<sup>1</sup> After the victory of the Cuban Revolution, Bayo returned to Cuba, where he died in 1965.



prison where they incarcerated émigrés,” recalls María Antonia. “There I saw Che. Dressed in an inexpensive transparent nylon raincoat and an old hat, he looked like a scarecrow. Trying to cheer him up I told him what kind of impression he produced.... When we were taken out for interrogation Che was the only one to be handcuffed. Angered at this I objected to the representative for the prosecution that Guevara was not a criminal who needed to be restrained and that it was not a practice in Mexico to handcuff even criminals. He returned to the prison without handcuffs.”

So it seemed that Fidel Castro had once again been defeated in his efforts to overthrow the tyrant Batista. The timid and ill-wishers rubbed their hands in glee: didn't this defeat offer still more proof of the futility and frivolity of such conspiracies. Children playing at revolution! They were reinforced by the fact that on April 29, not long before the arrest of Fidel and his friends, a group of youths inspired by the example of the Moncada heroes tried to seize the Goicuría barracks in Matanzas, and all participants were killed by Batista's butchers.

But Fidel thought in categories quite different from those of his critics. He accepted failures as the inevitable cost of revolutionary struggle. Defeats merely stiffened his will and strengthened his faith in the ultimate victory of the cause to which he had dedicated his life. His stoutness and optimism were transmitted to his followers. “We never lost our faith in Fidel Castro,” wrote Che, recalling his period of confinement in the Mexican prison.

The arrest of the revolutionaries aroused the indignation of the progressive sector of Mexican society. Among those who began to make appeals in their behalf were the former president of Mexico Lázaro Cárdenas, his former Naval Minister Heriberto Jara, the labour leader Lombardo Toledano, the famous artists David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera as well as other eminent writers, scholars and university figures. Batista was, in fact, too odious a figure even for the Mexican authorities. Deciding that the arrests and the newspaper coverage had buried Fidel Castro's plans, the Mexican authorities demonstrated their “humanism” by releasing all of the prisoners after a month's confinement—all except Ernesto Guevara and the Cuban Calixto García. They were accused of entering Mexico illegally.

Once released from prison Fidel continued with all his energy to prepare the unit for the move to Cuba. Again he collected

money, bought weapons, set up conspiratorial apartments and established passwords and signals. The soldiers, divided into small groups, conducted military exercises in the country's remote forests. From the Swedish ethnographer Wenner Gren they bought a yacht called the *Granma* for \$ 12,000. The *Granma* had been built for 8 or at the most 12 passengers, but she had to fit more than 80 soldiers. This did not upset Fidel—in fact there was no other way out.

Fidel made use of all of his connections to get Che and García out of prison as quickly as possible. Che tried to convince Fidel not to waste time and energy on them, fearing that this might hold back the departure of the *Granma*. Fidel replied firmly: "I won't abandon you!"

In prison someone stole Che's clothes while he was asleep. Hilda Gadea recalled that "we decided to collect money and buy him some new clothes but were afraid that he wouldn't accept a gift. To our surprise he even wanted to choose the suit himself. He picked out a dark brown one, but within a half-hour gave it to Calixto García...."

The Mexican police arrested Hilda as well, but everything turned out fairly well. Some time later they were both released. Che had spent 57 days behind bars. Now he returned to his former position next to Fidel and Raúl.

Police agents continued to watch the Cubans. From time to time they broke into their apartments. The papers wrote that Fidel had not relented and was preparing his men for departure for Cuba.

It was imperative to rush the preparations or else the undertaking might really collapse. But much still remained to be done and much was yet unfinished, they were short of weapons and ammunition, and they had no money. Here Frank País came to the rescue. He brought \$8,000 from Santiago and reported that his people were ready for the revolt in the city.

Early in November the police again burst unexpectedly into several of the apartments. Fidel learned that his personal bodyguard Rafael del Pino, the man in whose name the *Granma* had been purchased and who was entrusted with the radio equipment, had agreed to turn over the entire group to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico for the sum of \$15 thousand. Now delay meant sure death. Fidel gave the order: isolate the provocateur and without delay gather everyone with weapons and equipment

in Tuxpan, a small fishing port in the Gulf of Mexico, where the *Granma* was docked.

Maintaining strict secrecy, Fidel ordered that some firearms be stockpiled in a secure place in Mexico. In reply to the puzzled questions of his comrades Fidel said:

“If we meet with failure again, I’ll return to Mexico, find reliable people and again return to Cuba—this time by airplane. We’ll land by parachute in the mountains. And I’ll keep on until either they kill me or we free our homeland from tyrants and exploiters.”

Fidel gave the final instruction: to send to Frank País in Santiago the agreed-upon telegram with the words “the book is sold”. With this message País could begin the uprising at the established time in the capital of Oriente.

Che took his handbag with his medical instruments (with all his other responsibilities, still he was the unit’s doctor), raced home to Hilda, kissed his sleeping daughter and hastily wrote a farewell letter to his parents. Like all his other letters to those close to him, the message was spiced with black humour. It could be summarised as follows: The cause which I’m off to serve is worth dying for, although it is a bit like beating one’s head against the wall. “Don’t forget your inhaler, and don’t lose it,” Hilda told him. But of course Che forgot it. The things that can happen to a greenhorn guerrilla fighter!

At two in the morning, November 25, 1956, the unit boarded the *Granma* in Tuxpan. There was noise, laughter and confusion on the pier. The local police had been won over by a *mordida*—“piece” or simply bribe, and were conspicuous by their absence. Some time passed while 82 people with guns, ammunition and other military supplies loaded in the toy-size yacht, which now looked like a full can of sardines. Rain pelted down and the sea was stormy but there could be no hesitation now. Forward was the only way to go!

Che, Calixto García and three other future insurgents arrived at the departure point last.

It had only been possible to make it to Tuxpan by automobile. Getting off at one of the train stations. Che and his friends began to thumb down passing cars. “It turned out very difficult to find a ride,” recalled Calixto. “We stood on the street for a long time. Finally we stopped a car and asked the driver to take us to the port. He demanded 180 pesos and we agreed. But after a while he

got the jitters and refused to go any farther. It was a difficult situation, so much time had already been lost, and now this unforeseen difficulty....

"Then Che said to me: 'Watch the road and I'll take care of the driver.' After some difficulty he talked him into taking us as far as Poza Rica, which was a bit more than half the way, and there, changing to another vehicle we proceeded along to the rendezvous point. Finally we saw the little town of Tuxpan. Entering it we met Juan Manuel Márquez and he led us to the river where the *Granma* stood at the bank."

The latecomers hurried on board the *Granma*.

Fidel ordered: "Pull in the lines and full steam ahead!"

The unbelievably overloaded *Granma* dimmed her lights, laboriously moved away from the pier and headed on course for Cuba.

The fighters were singing the Cuban anthem and the song of the July 26 Movement.

Fidel kept his word: in 1956 they were to become either heroes or martyrs.

# Sierra Maestra

## Fighting in the Mountains

Onward, to meet the dawn,  
Comrades in struggle!  
With bayonets and shells  
We shall clear our own way!

The Young Guard  
(Russian revolutionary song)

At sea the *Granma* ran into a storm. “The ship,” Che wrote in his reminiscences, “began to resemble a tragi-comedy: all around were miserable faces, hands clutched to the stomach, some buried their heads in a bucket, others were sprawled in the strangest poses. Out of 82 on board only 2 or 3 sailors and 4 or 5 passengers escaped sea-sickness.”

Unexpectedly the ship began to take in water. The bilge pump broke down and the ship’s engine stopped. They tried to bail out the water with buckets. To lighten the load they threw their canned food overboard. Then it was discovered that the cause of the inundation was an open tap in the heads. With difficulty they got the engine working again.

Calixto García recalled this episode: “It would take a rich imagination to picture the scene: how we ever managed to squeeze 82 armed and outfitted men on that little craft! The yacht was packed tight. People were literally sitting one on top of another. We had taken a minimal amount of food supplies. During the first days each was given a half can of condensed milk, but that soon ended. On the fourth day everyone received a piece of cheese and sausage, and on the fifth all that remained were rotten oranges.” Yet they still had three days of travel ahead of them....

While on the *Granma*, Che suffered from severe attacks of asthma but, as Roberto Roque Nuñez recalled, he held up and found the strength to joke and cheer the others up....

Because of this Roberto, who, by the way, was an experienced sailor and had been appointed navigator by Fidel (the captain was Ladislao Ondino Pino), the group lost several precious hours. Trying to determine their coordinates, Roberto climbed up on top of the wheel-house and was swept overboard by a wave. It took some time to find the ill-fated sailor and haul him aboard.

The overloaded yacht steamed slowly towards the island, several times falling off course. Fidel had counted on landing at the village of Nicaro near Santiago on November 30. From there he hoped to head for Santiago where Frank País and his supporters were to begin the uprising on that very day. But on November 30 the *Granma* was still two days away from the coast of Cuba.

At 5:40 a.m. in Santiago the supporters of the courageous Frank País poured in the city streets and seized the government buildings. But they could not hold the city. That same day Batista's airplanes spotted the *Granma* near the shores of Cuba.

It was only on December 2 that the *Granma* finally reached her destination.

"The order was given to prepare for battle," recalled one of the participants. "No words could describe our sensations then, especially for those of us who had long ago left our homeland. We glided along silently, our engine muffled. Everyone strained his eyes ahead trying to make out the shore. We could hear the keel and bottom scraping against the sand. We were in Los Colorados in the area of Cape Cruz, the municipal district of Niquero, Oriente Province."

The *Granma* came to a halt on a shoal. The yacht had a lifeboat but as soon as they let her into the water she sank. The soldiers had no choice but to wade ashore in water up to the neck. All they could take with them were weapons and a bit of food. Batista's patrol boats and aircraft immediately swarmed to the spot and opened up a murderous fire against Fidel's men. "This was a shipwreck, not a landing," Raúl Castro later observed.

The revolutionaries had to spend a good deal of time making their way through the swampy and silty coastland. Wanda Wasilewska who visited the spot in 1961 described it in her book *The Archipelago of Freedom*: "Swamp and mangrove undergrowth. Ferruginous sticky swamp, over which is spread a fantastic weave of bare roots and mangrove branches, covered with fleshy and

The young Che. 1943



The family of Ernesto Guevara Lynch (Che is on the extreme left)



Che—the glider-pilot. 1946

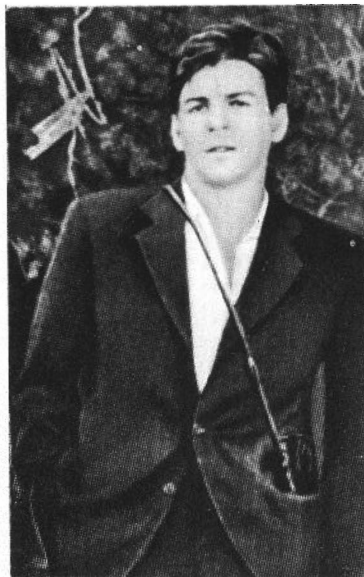


On the Amazon with Mial





Che—"King of the Pedal". 1950



In Mexico. 1955



Ascent of the Popocatepetl Volcano near Mexico City. 1956



The young doctor

A Mexican police information form

ELI ACOSTA

Matrícula  
-Expediente

E. 1. 1. 3. 3  
A. 1. 1. 1. 2.

**RAFAEL GUTVAIN KERN**  
Nombre completo

Fecha de Nacimiento: 14 de Julio de 1928  
Lugar de Nacimiento: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA  
Nombre de los Padres: BENJAMIN GUTVAIN LISCHY y ELIZABETH LA NIEVA  
Esposa: NIEVA GADIEL AGOSTA  
Estado Civil: casado Estatura: 1.78 mts.  
Color: blanco Pelo: cast. lto.  
Frente: recto Nariz: recta  
Ojos: café osc. Labios: rosados  
Boca: grande Muecas: varias  
Ocupación: MEDICO - CHIRURJANO de OJOS, ANOS 1953 - 1963  
Dirección: SANTIAGO 49  
Referencia: Calle 14 de Julio

CHIRURJANO - cuando al tiempo de EMERACION  
dijo con VERGÜENZA  
AS REFUGIO en la UNIVERSIDAD DE MEXICO - 1964

Forma del Expediente



With his daughter in the prison courtyard in Mexico City. 1956

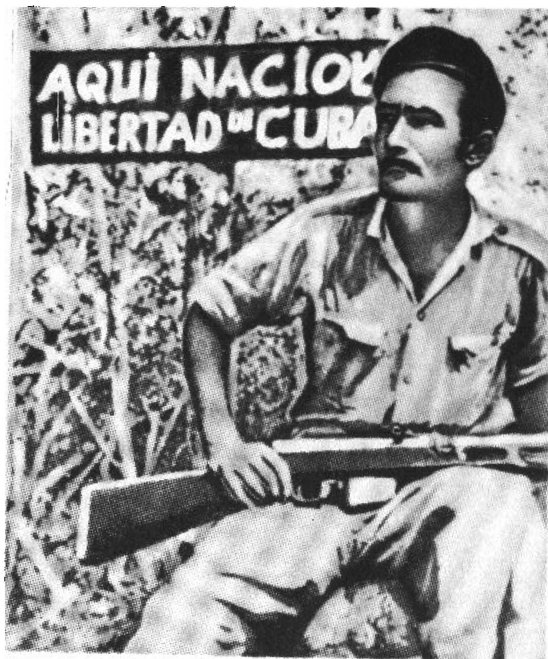


Fidel Castro planning a guerrilla operation. Che is on the left



Two friends in the Sierra Maestra. Raúl Castro and Che

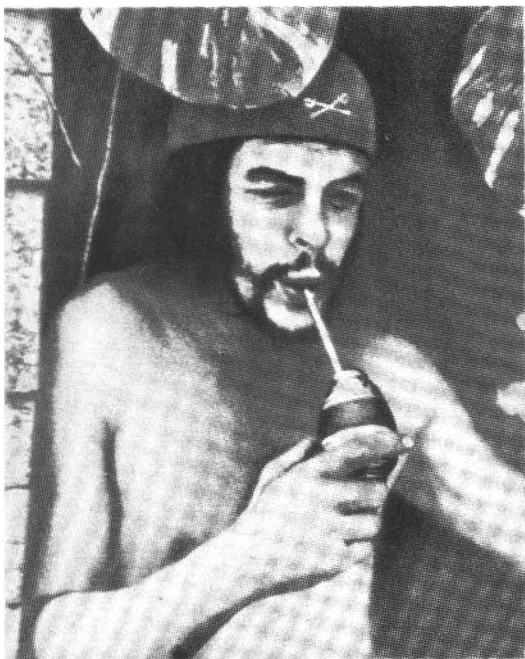
"This Marks the Birthplace of Cuban Freedom". Inscription at the site of the *Granma* landing



In the Sierra Maestra. Che is with the baby



In the Sierra Maestra. Stricken with asthma, Che is reading Emil Ludwig's *Goethe*

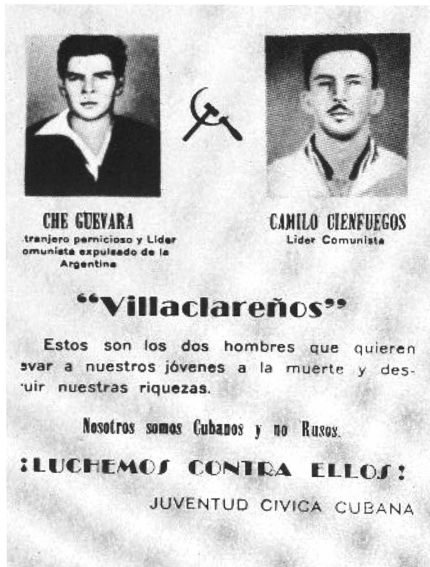


Drinking *mate* in the  
Escambray Mountains



Che in La Cabaña Fortress. January 1959 (photo credit: V. Chichkov)





A police poster appealing for struggle against the "communist leaders" Che and Camilo Cienfuegos



The battle for Santa Clara. The enemy has surrendered! First smiles from Che and Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez





The battle for Santa Clara. In the Leoncio Vidal barracks. To the left is Aleida March



Meeting his parents in Havana. 1959



Wedding. Che and Aleida are in the centre



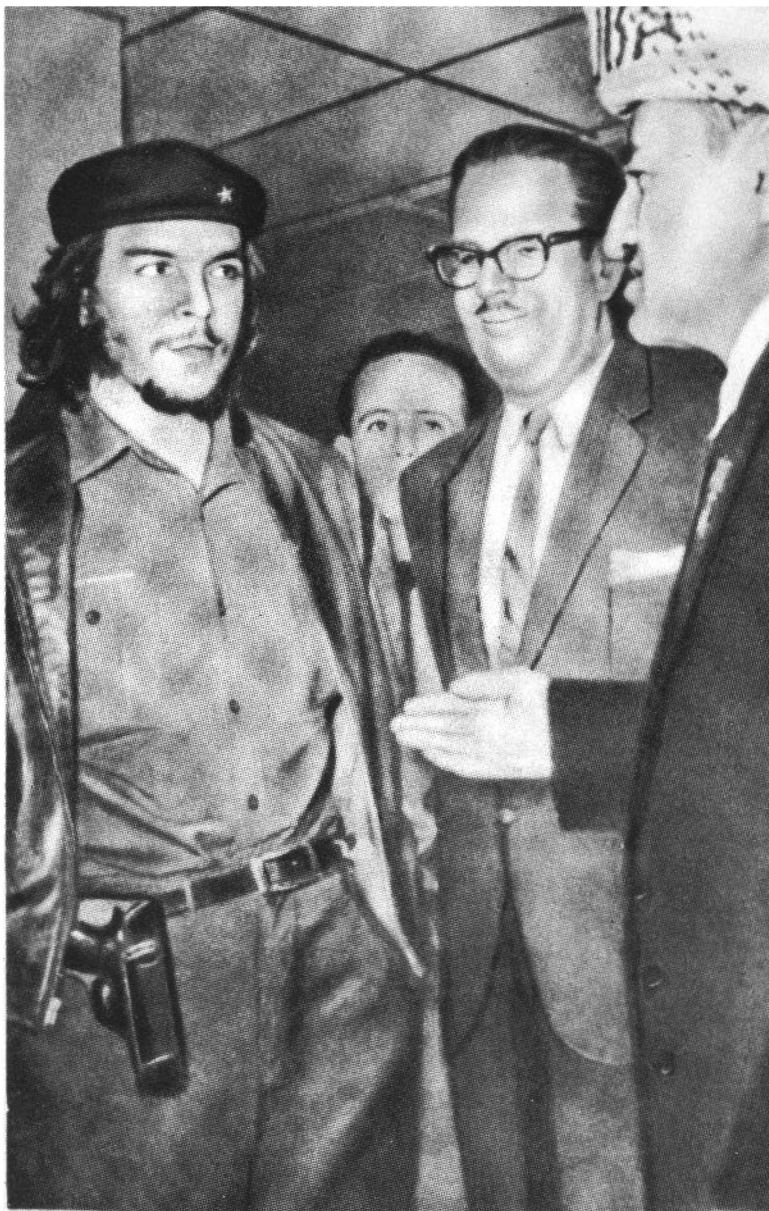
Director of the National Bank



Planning the Agrarian Reform. Fidel Castro, A. Núñez Jiménez and Che



Che meeting Arbenz in Havana (photograph by N. Chitil)



Meeting Mikoyan. In the centre is Cuba's President, Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado



At the Soviet Exhibition of Science, Technology and Culture, Havana, 1960



Che signing the agreement on technical aid from the Soviet Union

glossy leaves. This is not an alder thicket which one can easily part, nor is it a grove of willows, whose branches bend to the touch—it is a network of firm, closely-spaced bars. Their roots go deep into the silt. In places the soil seems firmer, sometimes the mangrove branches are interwoven just above the water that makes small lakes, but there, too, the bottom is reddish muck.”

Overcoming this barrier comparable to a series of barbed-wire fences required an inhuman effort on the part of these exhausted, hungry and thirsty soldiers. Wasilewska noted that if she hadn't gone through the war and seen the retreat of 1941 along roads buried in autumn mud she might not have sensed such anguish at the sight of this undergrowth in distant Cuba. But she could see from experience what these men from the *Granma* had gone through and how some of them had died in this muck.

It seems that history really does repeat itself. Sixty years back, somewhere not distant from this spot the legendary *mambises*, Cuban patriots, had fought. They had been led by the courageous fighter for Cuban independence, General Antonio Maceo. Pyotr Streltsov, a Russian volunteer fighting in the ranks of the insurgents, left his recollections published in *Vestnik Evropy*. He wrote of his comrades: “They mutilated their bare feet against the rocks and the heavy boxes they were carrying rubbed the skin on their backs raw. They came down with the yellow fever falling on the bare rocks with muted groans ... the healthy ones continued forward, literally carrying the liberation of their homeland on their backs. Many of them ate virtually nothing during the entire transit, that is to say, 4 to 5 days. But despite this I never heard a complaint or reproach: so great was the onrush of patriotism among the insurgents.”

Now the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these heroes were traversing the same mournful route of sacrifice and deprivation, on their way to bring down the new enslavers of their homeland.

For two days Fidel Castro's men, trusting in chance guides, tried to get away from searching enemy planes.

“Throughout the night of December 4,” wrote Che, “we moved about a sugar cane plantation. We relieved our thirst and hunger by nibbling on sugar cane, throwing the scraps out as we proceeded. This was an inadmissible oversight, since Batista's troops could easily follow our trail.

“But, as it became clear much later, it wasn't these scraps but

our guide who gave us away. We released him on the very eve of the events described here and he led our pursuers directly to our unit. We committed that error more than once before we understood how careful and vigilant we had to be.

"By morning we were completely exhausted and decided to make a brief halt on the territory of a *central*<sup>1</sup> at a place called Alegría de Pío. Sleep overcame us almost before we had settled in.

"Around noon airplanes droned overhead. Exhausted by the difficult march we at first paid little attention.

"Since I was the unit's doctor I had to provide first aid to those whose feet were covered with sores and rubbed to the flesh. I clearly remember that the last whom I treated that day was Humberto Lamotte.

"Leaning against a tree trunk, Comrade Montané and I were talking about our children and eating our scanty ration, a piece of sausage and two biscuits, when suddenly the shooting started. A second later a hail of gunfire swept into our group of 82. Mine wasn't the best rifle. I had deliberately asked for one of the worst weapons, for I had been racked with asthma throughout our sea crossing and it made no sense for one of the best guns to be wasted on me.

"We were almost defenceless before the furious enemy assault: all that remained of our military equipment after the landing from the *Granma* and the march through the swamps were a few rifles and a handful of cartridges, most of them soaked through.... I remember that Juan Almeida ran up to me asking what to do. We decided to make it as quickly as possible to the sugar cane, for we knew its cover was our hope for salvation!...

"Then I noticed that one of our men was throwing away his cartridges as he fled. I seized his arm trying to stop him, but he broke away, crying: "We're finished." His face was contorted with fear.

"This must have been the first time that I was confronted with the dilemma of choosing between the professions of doctor and soldier. I had with me a knapsack stuffed with medicine and a box with cartridges. I only had the strength to carry one of them. I grabbed the box and raced across the clearing separating me from the cane field.

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<sup>1</sup> *Central*—a sugar factory with a plantation.



"The volleys intensified. Machine-gun fire sputtered. Something struck me hard in the chest and I fell. Obeying some instinct of the wounded I fired once in the direction of the mountains. And at that moment, when all seemed lost, I suddenly remembered a story by Jack London. His hero, understanding that he was to die, prepared himself to accept death with dignity.

"Arbentosa lay next to me. Though covered with blood he continued firing. Not able to muster the strength to get up I signalled to Faustino, and he, still shooting, turned, nodded amicably and shouted: 'Never mind, brother, hold on!'

"Overcoming the terrific pain I raised my rifle and began to unload at the enemy, firmly determined that if it was time to die I'd make them pay for it as dearly as possible.

"One of our men shouted that we should surrender, but right away we heard the loud voice of Camilo Cienfuegos: 'Coward! Fidel's men never give in!...'

"Almeida suddenly appeared. He grabbed me and pulled me into the reeds where the other wounded lay, and Faustino dressed their wounds.

"At that moment enemy airplanes roared just above our heads.

"The frightening din, sputter of automatic fire, cries and moans of the wounded—everything blended into an indistinguishable rumbling.

"Finally the airplanes disappeared and the firing died down. We gathered together again, but now there were only five of us left—Ramiro Valdés, Chao, Benítez, Almeida and myself. We succeeded in making our way through the plantation and hiding in the forests without incident. A loud crackling could be heard from the direction of the cane reeds. I turned around: the recent battle site was engulfed in thick clouds of smoke.

"I'll never forget Alegría de Pío: there, on December 5, 1956, our unit was baptised in battle, there we first took on the overwhelming forces of Batista."

In this battle almost half of Fidel's men perished and some 20 fell prisoner. Many of them were tortured and shot. But when on the next day the survivors gathered in a peasant hut at the foothills of the Sierra Maestra, Fidel said: "The enemy defeated us, but could not destroy us. We shall fight and we shall win this war."

The bitter pill of defeat at Alegría de Pío was somewhat mitigated by the friendliness of *guajiro*, Cuban peasants. "We all felt

the sympathy and cordiality of the peasants,” wrote Che. “They welcomed us warmly and, helping us hold up through a succession of trials, hid us safely in their homes.... But it was Fidel’s faith in the people which was truly unlimited. He demonstrated an unusual talent both as organiser and leader. Somewhere in the woods we spent the long nights (with the dusk we were left idle) drawing up bold plans. We dreamed of battles, major operations and victory. These were happy hours. I joined the others and tried my first cigars, smoking to drive away the pesky mosquitos. From that time the aroma of Cuban cigars has never left me. My head spun, whether from the strong Havana or from the audacity of our plans, I don’t know which.”

However, not all of the survivors of the first battle shared Che’s and Fidel’s optimism. The heavy losses depressed them, the long marches wore them to the bone, the soldiers were short on discipline and lacked battle toughness.

How did Che evaluate the existing situation? In 1963 he wrote of the days following the landing from the *Granma*: “Reality disrupted our plans: there weren’t all the necessary subjective conditions for carrying out successfully the undertaking as such, not all the rules of revolutionary warfare were observed; these rules we were to learn only at the cost of our own blood and that of our brothers over a period of two years of hard struggle. We suffered defeat and then the most important part in the history of our movement began. Only then did we realise the true strength and historic significance of the movement. We understood that we had made tactical errors and that the movement was remiss in certain subjective factors: the people recognised the necessity of change, but they didn’t have enough faith in the possibility of implementing these changes. Our task consisted in convincing them of this possibility.”

But self-conviction had to precede efforts to convince the people. To gain this confidence an attack had to be launched and a serious, if minor battle had to be won. After all, it is success which breeds confidence. So the insurgents did win a victory on January 16 by attacking and seizing a military post on the La Plata River. Che took part in this operation. The battle tally was two dead, five wounded and three taken prisoner on the enemy side and no casualties for the insurgents. In addition the victors seized rifles, a Thompson sub-machine-gun, about a thousand rounds, other ammunition and provisions. Fidel ordered that the

wounded soldiers be treated, then released with the other prisoners.

But still it could only be said that the fortunes of the rebels had made a slight upturn. Che observed in his diary that the peasants although favourably disposed to Fidel's men, "were still not ready to take part in the struggle, and we lacked any communication with our supporters in the city". Batista's troops, aircraft and police continued to pursue the insurgents.

In these conditions Fidel made the decision to head for the Sierra Maestra, dig in there and use the mountains as a home base to launch their struggle against Batista's forces.

\* \* \*

What is the Sierra Maestra? Twenty years before the *Granma* landing the eminent Cuban writer and Communist Pablo de la Torriente Brau<sup>1</sup> wrote that if someone wanted to see another country without leaving Cuba he should visit the Sierra Maestra. There he would find not only different surroundings and different customs but also people who looked at life quite otherwise, freedom-loving, intrepid and noble people who kept their own scores with the police and authorities.

It was here that in the nineteenth century, during the war of independence the Cuban patriots found shelter and support. "Only grief will come to he who bares his sword against these peaks," wrote the author. "The insurgent with a rifle, hiding away in these indestructible cliffs can hold out against ten times his number. A machine-gunner with his nest in a gorge can withstand an onslaught by a thousand soldiers. Whoever wages war against these summits can forget about using airplanes. The caves will hide the insurgents. Only grief will come to he who intends to destroy the mountaineers! Like the trees clinging to the cliffs they will hold to their native land. Only grief will come to he who raises his sword against them! They have done what was never done before. Nurtured by their land and steeped in the history of their austere life they have covered themselves with everlasting glory by demonstrating miraculous courage. Let everybody know: the mountaineers stand as firm as the ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Pablo de la Torriente Brau fought as a volunteer in the International Brigades in Spain and died giving battle against the Francoists.

pinos. Better to die among their native rocks than to perish of hunger and poverty as Cuban trees perish when they are transplanted to alien soil in a prim English park.”

Fidel Castro, though born in Oriente Province, had never been to the Sierra Maestra Mountains and knew of them only second hand. This was true of everyone who was on the *Granma*. Che knew of the Sierra Maestra still less.

The mountains were unfamiliar but looked unassailable and promised salvation. And the rebels who survived the defeat at Alegría de Pío made for them. They were not mistaken, the Sierra Maestra became an invincible fortress, the first Free Territory in Cuba and in America.

The rebels had not even become accustomed to their new alpine home when on January 22, 1957, they defeated a unit of *casquitos* (Batista's soldiers) under the leadership of one of Batista's bloodiest henchmen, Sánchez Mosquera, in a brush near the creek Arroyo de Infierno.

Che wrote of his own role in this engagement: “Suddenly I noticed another enemy soldier trying to hide from our fire in the nearby hut. I fired and missed. The second shot caught ‘him square in the chest, and he collapsed, dropping his rifle, which stuck, bayonet first, into the ground. Covered by the *guajiro* Crespo I made my way to the corpse and took his rifle, cartridges and some equipment.”

Under insurgent pressure Sánchez Mosquera was forced to beat a hasty retreat, leaving behind five dead *casquitos*. The rebels suffered no casualties.

On January 28, Che wrote a letter to Hilda and had a trusted friend drop it in a mailbox in Santiago. This letter is our first written evidence of Che's estimation of the events in the two months after the *Granma* landing. He wrote:

“Dear Old Woman!

“I am writing you these burning Martian<sup>1</sup> lines from the Cuban *manigua*.<sup>2</sup> I am alive and thirsting for blood. You might say that I'm really a soldier (at least I'm dirty and in tatters), for a mess-kit is serving as my writing desk, a gun is slung over my shoulder and a new possession—a cigar—stuck between my teeth. Things

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<sup>1</sup> Martian—from José Martí, poet and fighter for Cuban independence (1850-1898).

<sup>2</sup> *Manigua*—thickets of wild, prickly underbrush.

haven't been easy. You already know that after seven days on board the *Granma* where we were packed so snug you couldn't even breathe, we ended up by fault of our navigator in some fetid undergrowth, and our misfortune continued until we were attacked in the already notorious Alegría de Pío and had to scatter like pigeons. I was wounded in the neck and remain among the living only thanks to my cat's lives, for a bullet from a machine-gun found my cartridge case which was slung around my chest, and from there it ricocheted against my neck. I wandered in the hills for a few days, regarding myself seriously wounded, for besides my neck wound my chest ached badly. Of those you know only Jimmy Hertzell died, he surrendered and they killed him. I spent seven days with Almeida and Ramirito—you know them—fearfully hungry and thirsty, until we escaped from the encirclement and with the help of the peasants joined up with Fidel (they say that poor Nico also died, though we're not yet sure of it). It took a good deal of effort to get organised again into a unit and arm ourselves once more. After that we attacked an army post, killed and wounded a few soldiers and took the others prisoner. We left the dead on the field of battle. A bit later we captured and disarmed another three soldiers. If you add to this that we haven't suffered a single loss and that in the mountains we feel very much at home, it becomes clear how demoralised their soldiers are. They'll never succeed in surrounding us. Of course the battle isn't over yet, we've still got a lot of fighting to go, but the scales are already tilted to our side and with every day more weight is added to our advantage.

"Now, about you, I'd like to know whether you are still at the same address, where I should write you, and how things are going, especially with our 'most tender petal of love'. Hug her and kiss her as hard as her little bones will allow. I was in such a hurry that I left your photographs at Pancho's house. Send them to me. You can write me sending the letters to Uncle's address or to Patojo. There might be a delay, but I think the letters will arrive."

The rebels continued to wander about the Sierra Maestra, pursued by enemy aircraft and Batista's soldiers. Hungry, thirsty, dirty, clad in rags and worn-out shoes, they avoided settlements, fearing treachery. But the traitor was in their midst. He was the peasant Eutimio Guerra, who had joined the unit soon after the landing. Eutimio knew every mountain path and found food for the rebels. But once he fell into the hands of the soldiers of

Batista. An ignorant and downtrodden peasant, he was tempted by the promises of his captors, who offered him a large reward if he would kill Fidel Castro. He waited for a convenient moment to carry out the crime and only chance helped expose him. Guerra confessed his treachery and asked before dying that after the victory of the rebels his children be given an education. His wish was fulfilled.

During these first months in the mountains Che's health was miserable. The period of acclimatisation was difficult for him. In February he was taken out of action by an attack of malaria and then by a spell of asthma which he couldn't relieve for the lack of medicine. During one of their marches the insurgents were caught unawares by their pursuers, who opened fire on them. They retreated in search of cover, but Che couldn't move. The peasant Crespo, putting Che on his back, carried him out of danger.

The rebels found a place for Che in the home of a farmer, an opponent of Batista, and left him there under guard. The farmer procured some adrenalin, which helped Che back on his feet, after which he returned to his comrades. But he was so weak that the distance which a healthy person could cover in a few hours took him ten days. "These were," wrote Che, "my most bitter days in the Sierra Maestra. I moved with difficulty, leaning on tree trunks and on the stock of my gun, accompanied by a cowardly fellow who trembled every time gunfire was heard, and became hysterical every time my asthma made me cough, for we could attract the attention of the enemy."

In April 1957, also during an asthma attack, Che clashed with soldiers under the command of Sánchez Mosquera. Running out of ammunition, he barely made his way to shelter. "Asthma at first took pity and allowed me to run a few metres, then it took its revenge: my heart thumped as if it were ready to leap out of my chest. Suddenly I heard the crunch of branches but by now I couldn't even force myself to run. But this time it was one of our new men, who had lost his way. Seeing me he said: 'Don't be afraid, commander, I'll die by your side!' The trouble was, I didn't want to die at all, I'd rather send him to the devil instead. I think that's what I did in fact. That day it seemed to me that I was a coward."

Only when asthma had completely knocked him out did Che, fearing to be a burden on his comrades, take to bed in a nearby peasant hut. When this happened instead of a rifle in his hands he

would have a book or a notebook in which he was taking down the most important events around him. In an extant photograph from those times we see him stretched out holding Emil Ludwig's biography of Goethe.

Captain Marcial Orozco, who fought in Che's column, wrote: "I recall that he had a lot of books. He read a lot and didn't waste a moment. Often he would sacrifice sleep in order to read or take down notes in his diary. If he got up at dawn he would begin the day with reading. Often he would read late into the night by the light of the campfire. He had excellent vision."

He could not live without poetry while in the Sierra Maestra too. One of the insurgents, Calixto Morales, remembered: "I was sent to Santiago, and he asked me to bring him two books. One was *Canto General* by Pablo Neruda and the other a collection of verse by Miguel Hernández. He really did love poetry."

Another witness, Captain Antonio, wrote: "I still don't understand how he could keep on his feet, for time and again his asthma suffocated him. However, he kept moving in the mountains, with a knapsack on his back, with weapons and all equipment—like the most seasoned soldier. He had an iron will, of course, but of even more importance was his devotion to his ideals—this is what gave him the strength."

If he was caught by an asthma attack while on the march, Che would not allow himself to fall out of rank. Joel Iglesias, a participant in the fighting in the Sierra Maestra, recalled: "When Che was suffering an attack he never let it affect the column's movement. The most that he would allow was that someone else carry his knapsack. Che considered that the column should never lose time because of his illness. This was the general rule for everybody. The ill ones never held up the unit. If you can't move—stay home and recuperate. If you can—then keep going. He never violated this rule."

This rebel—a foreigner, doctor, suffering from fits of asthma—attracted the special attention of the *guajiros*, evoking the surprise of some and the respect and compassion of others. An old peasant woman living in the mountains, Ponciana Pérez (Che jokingly called her "my fiancée"), recalled:

"Poor Che! I saw how he was suffering from asthma and could only sigh when an attack began. He would fall silent, breathing quietly to keep his pain to a minimum. During such an attack some people become hysterical, cough and open their mouths.

Che tried to restrain the attack and hold back the asthma. He would hole up in a corner, seated on a stool or a stone, and rest. Sometimes, talking with him I noticed that he would begin to pause between words, a sure sign that he was suffering an attack. I would hasten to make him something hot to drink to warm up his chest. This eased his pain. Holy Virgin! It was hard to watch this strong and handsome man suffer and wheeze as he did.

"But he didn't like it when someone pitied him. One would just say 'poor man' and get a swift and loaded glance from him. It was better to give him a bowl of medicinal soup unspiced by sighs or glances and without pitying words."

Although this unusual rebel was different from them and spoke in the queer language of the Argentines, the *guajiros* trusted him. Che won over many peasants by his simplicity, courage and fairness—human qualities esteemed at any latitude in this world.

One of the insurgents, Rafael Chao, added about Che: "He was always in a good mood and talked in even tones. He never shouted at anyone although his speech was interlaced with strong words. Yet he never allowed himself to yell or jeer. This, despite the fact that he did have a sharp, in fact very sharp tongue when the need arose.... I'd never seen anyone less egoistic. Even if all he had left was one *boniato*<sup>1</sup> he would give it to his comrades without question."

The guerrillero must be an ascetic, said Che, and he observed his own maxim. The guerrilla commander, taught Che, must be a model of irreproachable behaviour and readiness for self-sacrifice, and he followed his own dictates.

Fidel Castro said that Che was unusual in that he would throw himself into the most dangerous assignment without a second thought. This man, who had devoted himself to serving higher goals and who dreamed of the liberation of the other countries of Latin America, amazed his comrades with his altruism, his willingness to carry out the most difficult tasks and to risk his life daily.

The guerrilla fighter, wrote Che, must be in perfect health in order to cope with all adversities without falling ill. It is not difficult to read between these lines a sigh of regret for his own illness. How much moral effort it took to maintain his spirits during his bouts of asthma—we can only guess.

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet potato.



It should come as no surprise that this man was held in respect not only by the rebels but also by the *guajiros* among whom he lived and fought....

The diary which Che kept during the entire war served as the foundation for his famous *Episodes from the Revolutionary War*. This remarkable book is a truthful and dramatic account of the stern life of the guerrilla, of the sorrows, hopes and dreams of the people who came to Cuba to win or die in an unequal struggle against the insidious and ruthless enemy. But this book is also about Che, about a courageous, modest and kind man, although the author is laconic on the subject of himself and uses more than a touch of irony or humour, as if trying to reduce his own image.

Che's reminiscences are distinctive in style within the genre of Latin American memoirs. They are neither verbose nor melodramatic and they reveal no effort by the author at self-aggrandizement.

Che could not tolerate posing, boasting, exaggeration or self-advertising. His courage needed no touching up. Discussing in the *Episodes* a battle at the village of Bueycito in which he led his men he wrote: "My role in that battle was insignificant and by no means heroic—the few shots that actually rang out in the air I greeted not with my chest but quite with the opposite."

\* \* \*

Eventually ties were established with the underground July 26 Movement active in Santiago and Havana. Leaders and functionaries of the underground—Frank País, Armando Hart, Vilma Espín, Haydée Santamaría and Celia Sánchez—came to the mountains where they met up with Fidel. They undertook to supply the rebels with weapons, ammunition, clothes, medicine and money and to send volunteers into the mountains. They were also to mobilise the masses to struggle against Batista.

As long as even a handful of men were free in the mountains under Fidel's leadership Batista could not sleep in peace. From the time of the landing on he made almost daily announcements that the "*forajidos*" ("criminals") had been surrounded, crushed, exterminated. He threw his best troops and aircraft in pursuit of the rebels. But the shooting in the mountains kept up, which meant that the insurgents' hopes that all was not lost were growing stronger and that the spark ignited by Fidel might

in the final result turn into the flame of a people's liberation struggle....

To refute Batista's specious claims that the rebels had been crushed, Fidel Castro sent Faustino Pérez to Havana with instructions to find a reputable American journalist and bring him to the mountains. The choice fell upon Herbert Matthews, correspondent for the *New York Times*. Matthews slipped through Batista's agents and made his way to the mountains where he met Fidel Castro on February 17, 1957.

A week later the *New York Times* carried Matthews' sensational article about the leader of the rebels. The article established that Castro was alive and fighting successfully in the rugged and almost inaccessible mountains.

"From the looks of things," Matthews wrote prophetically, "General Batista cannot possibly hope to suppress the Castro revolt. His only hope is that an Army column will come upon the young rebel leader and his staff and wipe them out. This is hardly likely to happen."

Matthews' article, accompanied by photographs of Fidel and his fighters in the mountains dealt another blow to the already tenuous authority of Batista. His opponents abroad stepped up their activity. In the capital and other cities on the island the struggle against the dictator increased in scope.

On January 4, in Santiago a massive women's demonstration was held against the dictator. The women carried signs saying "Stop Killing Our Sons!"

In Havana the student organisation *Directorio Revolucionario* prepared for an uprising. On March 13, 1957, its members attacked the university, radio station and the presidential palace hoping to capture Batista. Although this attempt ended in failure—the majority of the rebels died in battle against the police and army—the anti-Batista sentiment continued to grow.

The terror, arbitrariness, corruption, the embezzling of state funds and grovelling before American businessmen, the Pentagon and the State Department typical of the Batista regime provoked the indignation and discontent of the bulk of the island's population, excluding only the ranks of the police and army loyal to the dictator, corrupt bureaucrats, rich sugar industrialists and that sector of the local bourgeoisie which had banked its fortunes on cooperation with American capital.

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In the middle of March the rebels received reinforcements: Frank País sent them a unit of 50 volunteers under the command of Jorge Sotús, an underground fighter from Santiago who had taken part in the November 30 uprising. The volunteers were trucked to their destination by Huberto Matos, the owner of a local rice plantation. Both Sotús and Matos were bitter anti-communists, later betrayed the revolution and were sentenced by a revolutionary tribunal to long terms in prison.<sup>1</sup> Fidel instructed Che to meet Sotús unit and take it under his command. However, Sotús categorically refused to turn over the unit to the Argentine. "At that time I was still bothered by my foreign identity and didn't want to aggravate matters," wrote Che. Fidel, learning of this, rebuked Che for not carrying out the order.

The new reinforcements were not trained for guerrilla warfare in the mountains. The urbanites had trouble making their way through the mountainous region, tired quickly and dumped their loads, disposing of what was most necessary—food, and retaining the superfluous—toilet articles.

Nevertheless the arrival of the unit almost doubled the insurgents' strength in one fell swoop. Fidel divided his troops into three platoons, putting them under the command of captains Raúl Castro, Juan Almeida and Jorge Sotús. The advance guard was placed under the command of Camilo Cienfuegos and the rear guard was given to Efigenio Ameñeiras, while control over the force guarding the general staff was given to Universo Sánchez. Che was assigned official doctor to the central headquarters, but in fact he functioned as adviser or special-duties officer under Fidel Castro.

Now that their ranks had been bolstered, Che proposed to Fidel that offensive action be launched immediately against Batista's forces. He suggested an attack against the first guard post encountered or a highway ambush to seize a lorry. But Fidel was of a different opinion: first the new recruits had to be seasoned, inured to the difficulties of life in the mountains and to long forced marches and taught to handle weapons properly. When they had "matured" an attack could be launched against one of the garri-

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<sup>1</sup> Sotús fled to the United States, where he was blown up by a mine during preparations for an act of sabotage against revolutionary Cuba.

sons situated in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra. The capture of such a garrison would produce a big splash throughout the country. Che agreed that Fidel's argument was well reasoned.

Training began for the upcoming military actions.

"In those trying days," recalled Che, "I finally obtained a canvas hammock. Such hammocks were a real treasure, but according to strict revolutionary code they were to be given only to those who had fashioned themselves a hammock out of burlap. The owners of burlap hammocks had first rights on the canvas ones as we received them. However, because of my allergy I couldn't get close to a burlap hammock. The fiber from the sacking irritated my condition and I was forced to sleep on the ground. But without a burlap hammock I had no right to hope for a canvas one. Fidel learned of this and made an exclusion, ordering that I be given one. I'll always remember that this happened on the banks of the La Plata as we were climbing the spurs leading to the Palma Mocha. It was on the day after we had tried horsemeat for the first time. Horsemeat was not simply a luxury, it also became a kind of battle test of human adaptation. The peasants in our unit indignantly rejected their portions of horsemeat, and some of them regarded Manuel Fajardo as almost a murderer. In peacetime he had worked as a butcher, so we took advantage of his profession and had him carve up the horse.

"This first horse belonged to a peasant by the name of Popa who lived on the opposite bank of the La Plata. The guerrillas mixed him up with an informer and confiscated a worn-out old nag. A few hours later the horse was served for dinner. For some it was a delicacy, but for the peasants' stomachs it was a sore trial. They regarded themselves as almost cannibals, chewing the flesh of man's old friend."

Batista's army and police did everything in their power to finish off the rebels in the Sierra Maestra and crush the opposition movement in the country. Terror, however, did not yield the desired results. The mountains turned out to be an insurmountable obstacle for Batista's troops. The press and radio told of the bold assaults by the rebels against the garrisons. The *barbudos* (bearded ones), as the peasants baptised Fidel's men who were hirsute through the absence of razors, received an onrush of volunteers of all political stripes. Outside Cuba emigrants made collections for them, purchased medicine and weapons which were secretly shipped to Cuba.

In May 1957, a ship called *El Corinthia* was to arrive from Miami, Florida, with volunteers under the command of Calixto Sánchez. Fidel decided to distract the attention of the foe patrolling the shores in expectation of the *Corinthia*, and he gave the order to take by storm the barracks in the village of Uvero, fifteen kilometres from Santiago. The garrison served to block the rebels' egress from the Sierra Maestra. The seizure of the fortified point in Uvero would clear the road leading into the valleys of Oriente Province and would demonstrate their ability to attack as well as defend. For Batista this would be the first major military defeat.

Che, who took part in the battle for Uvero, described the events in his *Episodes from the Revolutionary War*:

"After we had chosen the object of attack, all that remained was to draw up a detailed plan of assault. For this we had to determine the number of the enemy troops and outposts, the communications they used and the approaches affording access. Comrade Caldero, who later became a major in the Rebel Army, was of great help in carrying this out.

"We believed that the enemy had more or less precise information about us: two spies that we caught indicated that they had been sent by Batista's man Casillas to pinpoint the location of the units of the Rebel Army as well as our assembly positions.

"On the same day, May 27, the entire command staff gathered. Fidel declared that the battle would soon begin and that all units should be ready to march.

"Caldero was our guide: he was very familiar with the region around the Uvero barracks and knew all the approaches. We had to travel about 16 kilometres in one night. This wasn't easy, for the mountain road was winding and dropped steeply. Eight hours were taken up by travel: caution dictated that we stop on several occasions, especially while in the dangerous areas. Finally the order was given to attack the enemy. We had to seize the outposts and pour all manner of lead into the enemy barracks.

"We were aware that fortified outposts surrounded the barracks, each with no less than four soldiers.

"The shrubbery permitted us to creep up very close to the foe.

"Our staff directing the battle chose a command post on a slight elevation just opposite the barracks. A strict order had been issued not to open fire against residences where women and children might be found.

"The Uvero barracks was situated on the seashore and to surround it we had to move in from three sides.

"The attack on the outpost on the road running along the shore from Peladero was assigned to a group under the command of Jorge Sotús and Guillermo García. Almeida was charged with liquidating the outpost opposite the elevation.

"Fidel was located on the elevation, while Raúl and his platoon were to attack the barracks from the front. I was given an intermediate direction. Camilo and Amejeiras were supposed to operate in the interval between my group and Raúl's platoon but they lost their bearings in the darkness and ended up to the right instead of to the left of me. Crescensio Pérez platoon was to take the Uvero-Chivirico road and block the arrival of enemy reinforcements.

"It was assumed that the battle would be brief, since our attack was to be accompanied by total surprise. However, time passed and we couldn't get into our battle positions according to instructions. Reports flowed regularly through our guides Caldero and a local inhabitant named Eligio Mendoza. Light was already breaking, but the battle hadn't even begun. I lay on a large hillock, the barracks quite far below. So we decided to move forward and find a more advantageous position.

"Other detachments moved up. Almeida advanced towards the outpost covering the approaches to the barracks. To the left of me moved Camilo Cienfuegos in a cap resembling those worn by the Foreign Legion and bearing the emblem "July 26 Movement". The enemy spotted us and opened fire. But we continued to advance taking every possible precautionary measure. Soon our small detachment was reinforced by stragglers from other groups. These included a comrade from Pílon, nicknamed Bombá, Mario Leal and Acuña.

"The enemy fire was growing heavier. We had already come up to a clearing which we would have to cross. The enemy kept up directed fire. From our position, which was roughly 60 metres from the enemy's closest point, I could see two soldiers jump out of a trench and dash for the homes. I began to fire, but they had already entered a home where we were forbidden to fire: women and children were there.

"Meanwhile the group pushed out into the clearing. Bullets whistled all about. Suddenly I heard a moan next to me. It seemed to me that it must have been one of Batista's soldiers. I

crept up cautiously. It turned out to be Mario Leal. He was wounded in the head and needed to be bound up immediately, but with what? A short time later Joel Iglesias, moving behind me, dragged the wounded man into the bushes. Then we pushed forward. Soon Acuña fell. We stopped, hit the ground and began to pour fire into the well camouflaged enemy ditch ahead of us. The ditch could only be taken by a bold assault. I made the decision and we liquidated this pocket of resistance.

"It seemed as if the fighting took place in a flash, but in reality two hours and forty-five minutes passed between the first shot and the taking of the barracks.

"Finally an enemy soldier, hands high, jumped out of the log shelter opposite us. Shouts of surrender came from all directions. We got up and raced to the barracks.

"Standing in the courtyard we took prisoner two soldiers, a doctor and a medic. The number of wounded grew with every moment. I had no time to treat them, so I decided to turn them over to the doctor taken prisoner. Suddenly he asked how old I was and when I had received my diploma and candidly confessed: 'You know, fellow, you'd better take care of the wounded, I just finished my studies and don't have any experience.' Apparently this man, through a combination of fear and inexperience, had forgotten everything he had been taught. Once again I had to exchange my rifle for a doctor's smock....

"We lost our guide Eligio Mendoza in this engagement when he had raced at the enemy rifle in hand. Eligio was a superstitious man and wore a talisman. When we shouted 'Be careful!' at him, he scornfully replied: 'My saint will save me!' A few minutes later he was literally cut in two by a burst of machine gun fire.

"The worst wounded whom I had to treat that day was Comrade Cilleros. A bullet had smashed his shoulder, penetrated the lungs and lodged in his spine. He was in critical condition. I gave him some sedatives and bound up his chest. That was all I could do for him. We decided to leave two seriously wounded comrades, Leal and Cilleros, under the care of the doctor from the enemy garrison. I said goodbye, trying to conceal my anxiety for them. They announced that they would prefer to die among their comrades, that they would fight to the last. But there was no other way out. We had to leave them in the barracks with the wounded soldiers, whom we also gave first aid.

“Loading up one of the lorries with equipment and medicine, we set off for the mountains. We arrived at our base in short order and there we treated our wounded, burying the dead at the turn of the road.”

Crescensio's platoon did not take part in the storm, since it guarded the road to Chivirico. There the soldiers in this platoon had captured a few of Batista's troops who were trying to escape.

When all heads were counted it turned out that the rebels had lost 15 dead and wounded and the enemy 19 wounded and 14 dead.

For the rebels the engagement at Uvero was a turning point. It improved their fighting spirit and increased their faith in victory. The outcome of Uvero determined the fate of the enemy's small garrisons situated in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra. A short time later all these garrisons were liquidated.

Among those who distinguished themselves in combat at Uvero was Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez (his friends called him Vilo) who later under the sobriquet Joaquín would fight side by side with Che in the mountains of Bolivia and die there.

The engagement at Uvero offered further proof that the Argentine asthmatic was a natural warrior: he was courageous, level-headed and quick of wit. It was not for nothing that “professor” Bayo had regarded Che his best pupil. But that concerned theory, now he was confirmed in practice.

However combat was not a goal in itself for Che. Calixto Morales described Che as soldier in the following manner: “For him combat was part of his work and nothing more. After the shooting died away, even if the result was victory, the work had to be continued. Losses had to be added up, a summary of operations drawn up, and the ‘bag’ counted. That and no more. No meetings. No celebrations. Only on occasion, and then a few days later, would we gather in the evening to discuss the operations. He used even these conversations to point out mistakes, observe deficiencies and subject the past events to detailed scrutiny.”

Despite Che's efforts to establish himself as strictly a combat soldier and rid himself of the obligation to double as doctor, he never did succeed: he was still pressed to treat the wounded. He carried the work out conscientiously, that is, as far as the conditions and circumstances of guerrilla life allowed.

Legends circulated about Che's talents as a dentist in the Sierra Maestra. Once the unit in which he was serving obtained some



dental instruments. As soon as the men set up camp Che enthusiastically began to search for a tooth waiting to be pulled, an operation which would be completely new to Che. Some brave volunteers were found, although later they regretted placing their faith in Che.

"Not only did I have no experience," the make-do dentist later recalled, "but we didn't have enough pain-killers either. So we had to rely on 'psychological anaesthetics' and I gave my patients a good tongue-lashing if they complained too much while I was fishing around in their mouths."

Che also treated peasants: young women who had prematurely aged from the burden of work, and children with rickets. *Guajiros* suffered from avitaminosis, stomach disorders and tuberculosis. None of them had ever seen a doctor before. But the way to lighten the heavy burden of these mountaineers, these downtrodden, ill and deeply superstitious people, was not so much by medicine and the services of a doctor as through fundamental social changes and agrarian reform in particular.

Che was convinced of this and tried to spread his belief to the other rebels.

## The Daily Life of a Guerrilla

The best word is action.

José Martí

In inflicting the defeat against the forces of Batista at Uvero the rebels demonstrated that the regular army was by no means as invincible as supporters of the regime had loudly claimed. And although on the following day the army command reported that all the rebels disembarking from *El Corinthia* had been killed or taken prisoner, Batista nevertheless felt compelled to fly the flag at half mast over the *Columbia* military base in mourning for the dead *casquitos*. The enraged dictator ordered that all peasants be forced to abandon the slopes of the Sierra Maestra hoping therein to deprive the insurgents of the support of the local population. But the *guajiros* resisted the evacuation, many joined the ranks of the rebels or helped them in one way or another. They

helped them to find provisions, kept track of enemy movements and functioned as guides.

It would be wrong, however, to state that the coming together of peasants and guerrillas proceeded smoothly. This was a complex, contradictory and protracted process. Not all the peasants understood the political goals and mission of the rebels. The majority of these *guajiros* were illiterate and superstitious. Sometimes it would only take one careless word, gesture or thoughtless deed to lose their trust.

We can take a glimpse at the spiritual world of the *guajiro* through a story by Joel Iglesias who took part in the partisan struggle. It describes the life of the rebels in one of the mountain settlements: "At first, when we had just settled in this district, our circle of acquaintances was limited.... But gradually we came to know more and more peasants whom we could trust. This was mainly through the efforts of Che, his constant intercourse and frequent conversations with the peasants. This was how we won their sympathy. They all knew who we were but no one informed on us. In the evenings we sat down to talk and discussed various things, like how many men Fidel would have when we linked up with him again, or what would happen when the war ended.... But one theme intruded into our conversations nearly every evening: the legend of the witch-bird, a very ancient and venerable myth in these regions.

"It tells how one Spaniard once shot at this bird but couldn't kill it, and in fact almost paid for this deed with his life: his hat had been pierced in several spots. There was one unfortunate who didn't believe that such a bird existed, but once at night it appeared before him, and from that time on he was a cripple.

"During one such conversation I announced that if only the bird appeared I would kill it on the spot with my rifle. The peasants warned that anyone who talked like that was sure to encounter the bird, and the results would be dire.

"The next day my boast was the centre of conversation. Certain peasants even refused to be seen with me on the street. When Che and I were alone he asked me what I thought of the bird and why I had promised to shoot it. I explained that I didn't believe in witchcraft.

"A few days later we again returned to the subject and I availed myself of the opportunity to explain to the *guajiros* that although

I didn't believe in the bird I certainly respected the opinion of those who did."

The *guajiros* hated Batista and his henchmen, who plundered even their miserable hovels—*bohíos*, raped their daughters and cruelly harassed their families. But at the same time many *guajiros* regarded communism as what amounted to nearly the Evil Eye. This idea was promoted from the church pulpit and on the radio.

One episode is related eloquently by Iniria Gutiérrez, the first woman in Che's guerrilla unit, joining it when only 18 years old. "Once Che asked me of my religious views. This made me ask him whether he believed in God. 'No,' he answered, 'I don't believe, because I'm a Communist.' I was dumbfounded. I was very young then, had little experience in politics and had heard only terrible things about Communists. I jumped from my hammock and shouted: 'No. You can't be a Communist, you're such a good man!' Che laughed long and then began to explain all these dark areas to me."

Some of the rebels shared the ignorant peasants' anti-communism. Marcial Orozco recollected: "Once one of the men said that the war would continue even after Batista was overthrown. Then it would be time to fight the Communists. Che nudged me with his leg to draw my attention to these words and then told that soldier: 'You know, it's very hard to suppress the Communists.' 'Why?' he came back. 'Because they are everywhere, yet you never know who or where they really are. You can't seize them. Sometimes you'll be talking with a man and he'll be a Communist, but you'll never have an inkling of it.'"

Talking with the peasants and soldiers, Guevara sought insistently to dispel the clouds of anti-communism poisoning their consciousness. Of great interest here is his pamphlet published in the first issue of the rebels' periodical *El Cubano Libre* (The Free Cuban), and signed "Sniper". This pamphlet, released in 1958 was Che's first article to be published in Cuba. Below is the full text:

"News of events in distant countries reaches the summits of our Sierra Maestra through newspapers and radio that report quite candidly what is going on there because they cannot tell of the crimes daily committed here.

"So we read and hear of disturbances and murders taking place

in Cyprus, Algeria, Ifni and Malaysia. All of these have common features:

- a) the authorities 'have inflicted heavy losses on the insurgents';
- b) there are no prisoners;
- c) the government is not planning to change its policies;
- d) all revolutionaries, regardless of country or region in which they are active, are receiving secret 'aid' from the Communists.

"How much the whole world resembles Cuba! Everywhere the same events are taking place. A group of patriots, armed or unarmed, in revolt or not in revolt—is being killed, and the punitive force is once again 'victorious after protracted shooting'. All the witnesses are killed, so there are no prisoners.

"The government forces never suffer losses, which sometimes fits with reality, for it is not very dangerous to kill unarmed people. But often the absence of casualties is mere fiction. We offer the Sierra Maestra as irrefutable proof of their losses. Finally, what of the old, threadbare accusation of 'communism'.

"Communists, it would seem, are all who take up arms, because they are fed up with poverty, and it does not matter what country we are discussing.... Those who kill common people, men, women and children, call themselves democrats. How much the whole world resembles Cuba!

"But in Cuba and everywhere else the people will have the last say against injustice and evil, and the people will have their victory."

In Batista's newspapers and in official reports Che was always referred to as the "Argentine communist boss of a gang of bandits operating in the Sierra Maestra". Batista's official propaganda "exposed" the rebels as Communists and "agents of Moscow" and claimed that by defeating them Batista's troops would save Cuba and Latin America from communism. The tyrant knew the "weak spot" of his North American master: the persecution of communism always brought in immense dividends for the Latin American "gorillas" in the form of handouts from Washington's rich annual "haul" of profit.

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The degree of trust in the rebels shown by the peasants of the Sierra Maestra depended on the behaviour of the former vis à vis the mountaineers. To ensure that this behaviour be exemplary the

rebels were to bring order to their own ranks, and weed out the anarchistic and déclassés elements which always appear in such movements, particularly in the initial stages.

Discipline among the rebels during the first months of combat was decidedly lax. Che discusses this in the chapter *Acontecimiento Extraordinario* (An Extraordinary Incident) of his reminiscences.

Che was in a detachment under the command of Lalo Sardiñas, a dedicated and brave comrade, respected and loved by his soldiers. This detachment established a commission to enforce discipline with the powers of a military tribunal. Once a group of soldiers, trying to play a prank on the commission members, summoned them on urgent business to a place quite distant from the detachment's location. The jokesters were arrested and Lalo began to interrogate them. Flaring up, he struck one of the soldiers with his pistol. The weapon accidentally went off and the soldier fell dead. By order of Fidel, Lalo was arrested.

An investigation was launched and the witnesses questioned. Opinion was divided. Some felt that the killing was premeditated and others that it was an accident. But no matter what the case, arbitrary reprisals by a commander against his subordinates were completely unacceptable.

Fidel arrived and the interrogation of witnesses continued until midnight. Many demanded the death penalty for Lalo. Che spoke out against this demand, but his passionate speech could not sway the opponents of Sardiñas.

It was already late into the night but the discussion showed no sign of slacking. Finally Fidel had his say. He spoke long and heatedly, explaining why Lalo Sardiñas' life should be spared. Fidel spoke of the poor discipline among the insurgents, of the mistakes committed daily and the reasons for these mistakes, and in conclusion underscored that Lalo deserved a severe punishment, but that his act had been committed in defence of discipline, a fact which they should all keep in mind. Fidel's powerful voice, his emotional speech and imposing figure had a strong impact on the soldiers and many of those who had demanded that Lalo be shot now began to support Fidel.

When the question came to a vote, of the 146 men in the detachment 76 voted that Lalo be demoted in rank, while 70 voted that he be shot.

Sardiñas was demoted and Fidel appointed Camilo Cienfuegos to command the detachment.

The rebels had not only to struggle for internal discipline but also fight gangs of marauders who under the pretext of revolutionary goals plundered the peasantry, thus playing into the hands of the Batista regime.

Camilo Cienfuegos' unit was assigned the task of liquidating one such gang. Che tells how this order was carried out in the episode entitled "The Struggle against Banditry".

It was no easy task to introduce a firm revolutionary order in the Sierra Maestra. The low level of political consciousness of the population called for long and arduous political education. To make matters worse they were surrounded by Batista's troops. The rebels lived under the constant threat of an incursion into the mountains by the enemy.

In one of the mountain districts, Caracas, a band was active, plundering and wreaking havoc on the peasant economy. Its leader was a certain Chinese called Chang.<sup>1</sup> The bandits, disguising themselves under revolutionary slogans, pillaged, raped and killed. The name Chang terrorised the entire vicinity.

The rebels managed to liquidate the Chang band. The bandits were tried by a revolutionary tribunal. Chang was sentenced to death and the others to a variety of punishments. Three young men from the Chang band later joined the rebels and became good and honest soldiers.

"In those difficult times," wrote Che, "we needed a firm hand to eliminate all violations of revolutionary discipline and to prevent the spread of anarchy in the liberated regions."

Another problem calling for constant attention was desertion among the ranks of the rebels. The deserters included urbanites who were frightened off by the difficulties, deprivations and dangers of guerrilla warfare, but there were also peasants who fled. Che tells of an incident when one of the soldiers in his rank was shot for desertion:

"I gathered the entire unit on the side of the hill where the

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<sup>1</sup> There are about 100 thousand inhabitants of Chinese origin in Cuba. These are the descendants of Chinese coolies brought to the island in the second half of the nineteenth century to work on the sugar plantations. The overwhelming majority have been assimilated into the local population.

tragedy had occurred and explained to the rebels what this meant for us, why desertion would be punished by death and why he who betrayed the revolution deserved such a punishment.

"In grim silence we passed by the body of the man who had left his post; the incident produced a deep impression upon many of the soldiers, which was prompted most likely by a personal attachment to the deserter and frailty of political conviction rather than by a lack of fidelity to the revolution. There is no need to drag in names in this story.... I will only say that the deserter was a simple, backward country youth from this region."

Establishing a revolutionary consciousness among the rebels was a complex and difficult matter. Everyone, leaders, rank-and-file and peasants, took part in the "guerrilla school" in the Sierra Maestra.

The peasant world uncovered by Che in the Sierra Maestra attracted him most of all. In substance, the peasants were the first humiliated and oppressed whom he came to know really closely and with whom he had constant contact. He loved them without idealising them. Without their support the rebels could not have won or even survived in the mountains for any length of time. However, the *guajiros* also needed the rebels. Their life and hopes for a better future depended on the success of the guerrillas. In order to ensure the good will of the mountain people the insurgents had to demonstrate that they were their friends in deed as well as in word. And prove it they did: the guerrillas defended the *guajiros* from reprisals by the government soldiers and from the rich bloodsuckers. They taught and healed the peasantry—men, women and children. And they backed up the principle of land to the tiller. Che told a journalist who was visiting the Sierra Maestra in April and May of 1958:

"Earlier we didn't even dream of much that we are doing today. You could say that we became revolutionaries during the process of revolution itself. We arrived here with the goal of overthrowing a tyrant, but found a broad peasant zone which became the bulwark of our struggle. This zone needed liberation more than any other in Cuba. And not insisting on dogma and rigid orthodox views, we have given it our support, not merely verbal as various pseudo-revolutionaries had done before, but effective aid."

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Early in June 1957, Fidel divided the insurgent detachments into two columns. He personally retained command over the first one, the José Martí Column, while the second (or fourth, as it was called to confuse the enemy) was put under Che who, as everyone recognised, had already demonstrated remarkable military ability.

Che's column consisted of 75 soldiers divided into three platoons commanded by Lalo Sardiñas, Ciro Redondo (when he died a column was named after him) and Ramiro Valdés. Later, with the victory of the revolution, Valdés became Minister of Internal Affairs, and today is a member of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Some time later when the commanders were signing a letter to Frank País thanking him for his support and aid, Fidel remarked to Che: "Sign it major." Thus Captain Che was granted the highest rank in the Rebel Army. "That share of ambition which we all have in us," recalled Che, "made me the happiest person in the world that day." Celia Sánchez, in charge of the General Headquarters office, presented Che a wristwatch and a small five-pointed star to mark the occasion. He clipped the star to his black beret.

The successes of the rebels forced the leaders of the anti-Batista bourgeois opposition to establish direct contact with Fidel Castro. In July, Felipe Pazos and Raúl Chibás, the "prima donnas" of bourgeois politics, as Che called them, arrived in the Sierra Maestra. Pazos had been director of the *Banco Nacional de Estado* under President Prío Socarrás, and Chibás had been a leader of the Orthodox Party. Fidel joined them in signing a manifesto on the formation of a *Frente Cívico Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Civil Front). The manifesto demanded the resignation of Batista, the appointment of a provisional president (Pazos aspired to this post), general elections and an agrarian reform to distribute uncultivated lands among peasants.

Che wrote in his comments on this agreement: "We knew that this was a minimal programme limiting our efforts, but we also knew that it would be hard to impose our will from the Sierra Maestra. This is why for a long time we were forced to rely on many 'friends' who were trying to exploit our military strength and the trust enjoyed by Fidel among the people to further their



own shameless intrigues and above all to ensure the dominance of imperialism over Cuba—through a compradore bourgeoisie tightly linked with their northern bosses.”

Meanwhile Batista’s police and troops, after their repeated defeats in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, intensified the terror in the towns and villages of the country. On July 30, 1957, Frank País and his brother Josué were struck down by police bullets on the streets of Santiago. A protest strike erupted in response to the murders. The strike drew in almost the entire population of Santiago before it was cruelly suppressed by the authorities.

On September 5, 1957, the sailors revolted on a naval base in Cienfuegos. They were led by oppositionist officers who hoped by overthrowing Batista to prevent the growth of a genuine popular movement. But this uprising also ended in defeat. Troops loyal to the dictator crushed the rebels, and the prisoners were shot. During and after the uprising the death tally among the opponents to the tyrant in Cienfuegos came to more than 600 men and women.

Batista’s punitive squadrons struck mercilessly against the Communists, members of the *Partido Socialista Popular*, who were continuing their struggle to unite the efforts of all workers and all progressive forces against the tyrant and giving comprehensive aid to the insurgent movement under Fidel Castro. “The work carried out in illegal conditions by our party members and those of the *Unión de la Juventud Socialista*,” Blas Roca, the General Secretary of the Party, said in 1959, “demanded consistency, courage and staunchness, for all who were arrested were subjected to abuse and torture, and many were savagely killed.”

The Mexican columnist Mario Gil, the author of a book on Cuba in that period, noted that terrorist acts, unbelievably barbaric tortures, the murder of innocent civilians in response to revolutionary actions—all this turned the island into one great battle field. On the one side was the dictatorship, armed with powerful modern weapons provided by the United States. Opposing it were the people, unorganised but united by their hatred of the dictatorship. Unable to cow the nation by terror, Batista offered a price for the head of Fidel Castro. The entire province of Oriente was flooded with announcements of the following type:

“Announcing that any person providing information that helps

achieve success in operations against the rebel groups under the command of Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, Crescencio Pérez, Guillermo González or other leaders, will be awarded in conformity with the importance of the information provided: the reward shall be no less than 5 thousand pesos.

"The amount of the award varies from 5 thousand to 100 thousand pesos; the higher extreme would be payed for the head of Fidel Castro himself.

"Note: the informer's name will forever remain anonymous."

But even for this lucrative sum Batista couldn't find another Eutimio Guerra.

Fleeing from police brutality many opponents of Batista took refuge in the mountains and swelled the ranks of the rebels. Centres of rebellion now emerged in the Escambray Mountains, the Sierra del Cristal and in Baracoa district. These groups were led by members of the Revolutionary Directorate and the July 26 Movement and by communists.

"Comparing the results of the revolutionary struggle in the cities and the actions of the guerrillas," concluded Che, "one can clearly see that the latter form of popular struggle with the despotic regime is the more effective and results in less casualties among the people. While partisan losses were kept to a minimum, professional revolutionaries, rank-and-file and civilians were being killed in the city, a fact explained by the vulnerability of the urban organisations during the times of repression unleashed by the dictatorship."

In the cities, wrote Che, well-organised acts of sabotage alternated with desperate but unnecessary terrorist acts resulting in the deaths of the best sons of the people without bringing palpable gain to the cause.

Cuban bourgeois politicians, still hoping to make political capital of the rebels' exploits in the Sierra Maestra, assembled in Miami in October and began to divide up the hide of the bear before it was even slain. They set up a Council of Liberation, proclaimed Felipe Pazos provisional president and drew up a manifesto to the people. Figuring in these manoeuvres was Jules Dubois, an agent of the CIA in constant touch with the Miami conspirators.

In a public statement Fidel Castro sharply condemned the intrigues of the bourgeois "prima donnas" who grovelled before the USA. "We remained in isolation," said Fidel after the victory

of the revolution, "but it was a case where it was a thousand times better to act alone than in bad company." The goal of these political manipulators was obvious: to seize victory from the hands of the insurgents, restore "a democratic system" after the fall of Batista, pacify the working people and again play the old tune of anti-communism to soothe the North American bosses. But Fidel rejected the Miami Pact and the insidious plan was destined to failure.

Che wholeheartedly supported the stand taken by Fidel. In a letter to Fidel he wrote: "Once again I congratulate you on your declaration. I told you before that your merit would always rest in the fact that you demonstrated the possibility of armed struggle with the support of the people. Now you have taken a path of even greater significance, one leading to power through armed struggle by the masses."

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By the end of 1957 the picture had brightened for the rebels. Now they held control over the Sierra Maestra. A kind of a brief truce took place: Batista's troops did not advance into the mountains while the rebels built up their strength and refrained from dipping into the valley.

The "peaceful" life, as Che told it, was very difficult. They were short of food, clothes and medicine. The situation was tight with weapons and ammunition. The absence of a newspaper and radio station hindered efforts to politically educate the people.

At the outset the small guerrilla units had obtained supplies of food from day to day, but as their ranks swelled it became necessary to establish a regular and centralised supply of food-stuffs. The local peasants sold the rebels beans, corn and rice, and helped them to purchase other produce in the settlements. The rebels procured their medicaments largely through the urban underground network, but shortages were acute.

In the intervals between fighting Che applied himself energetically to consolidating the guerrilla "rear lines" by organising medical points, field hospitals and weapons workshops. There were also workshops which made, albeit crudely, footwear, knapsacks, bandoliers and uniforms. Che made a special occasion of presenting the first military cap sewn in these workshops to Fidel Castro.

Che also tried his hand at setting up a miniature tobacco factory turning out cigarettes which the soldiers smoked with great pleasure despite the admittedly inferior quality—for beggars can't be choosers! The guerrillas confiscated their meat from traitors and large-scale ranchers and turned over a portion of this meat to the local population.

At Che's initiative and under his editorship a newspaper was established in the mountains. The first copies of *El Cubano Libre* were handwritten, and later they were printed on a hectograph. The Cuban patriots struggling for independence at the close of the nineteenth century had published a newspaper by the same title. Informing Fidel of the publication of the first issue, Che wrote him: "I am sending you the first number and some printed programmes. I hope that the inferior technical quality will shock you into writing something to put over your own signature. The leading article in the second issue will be devoted to fires on sugar cane plantations. In this issue Noda presents an article on agrarian reform, Quiala 'Reaction and Crime', the doctor on 'The Life of the Cuban Peasant', Ramiro the latest news and I have given an explanation of the title of the newspaper, the editorial and an article called 'Not One Bullet Wasted!'"

The rebels were able to procure a small radio transmitter. The quality of broadcasts improved steadily, and by the end of 1958 the installation was placed with Column No. 1 of the Rebel Army and the station became one of the most popular in Cuba.

By the end of the first year of struggle close ties had been established with residents of the nearby towns and settlements. People travelled by secret paths to the mountains bringing the latest news.

The local *guajiros* immediately informed the rebels of the approach of *casquitos*, in fact of the arrival of any stranger in the mountains, and this rendered harmless the activities of many enemy scouts.

"As far as the political situation was concerned," Che wrote in his *Episodes*, "there were many complexities and contradictions in this period. In its activities the Batista dictatorship relied upon a venal congress, and disposed of powerful propaganda means, day in and day out calling for national unity and consent from the people...."

"A multitude of groups and groupings mushroomed in the country, and a muted but bitter struggle was carried on among

them. The overwhelming majority of such groupings dreamed of seizing power. They were infested with agents of Batista, who was kept informed of their activities.

"Despite the gangland features marking the activities of such groups, they also included honourable men whose names still enjoy the respect of the people today. The Revolutionary Directorate, though adopting a line of insurrectionary struggle in March, nevertheless soon parted ways, proclaiming its own slogans. We received support on certain concrete issues from the *Partido Socialista Popular*, but mutual distrust prevented us from uniting.

"In our own movement there existed two distinct points of view concerning struggle methods. One, defended by the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, emphasised the necessity of expanding the partisan movement to other regions and the liquidation of the apparatus of tyranny through persistent armed struggle. The revolutionaries from the plains supported a different position, proposing organised action in all cities, which would eventually turn into a general strike resulting in the toppling of the hated Batista regime.

"At first glance this viewpoint seemed even more revolutionary than ours. But in reality the proposals by our comrades for a general strike were far removed from the demands of the moment. The political level of those who defended this notion was not quite advanced....

"These points of view enjoyed roughly equal support among the leadership of the July 26 Movement, whose composition fluctuated more than once during the period of struggle...."

In a speech at Sagua la Grande on April 9, 1968, Fidel had the following to say concerning this issue: "Elementary justice calls for the observation that because of the nature of our struggle which began in the Sierra Maestra and due to the fact that in the final result the decisive fighting was waged by guerrilla forces, over an extended period almost all attention, all recognition and all praise went to the guerrilla movement in the mountains. It should be noted, for it is both wise and useful to be fair, that to a large measure these circumstances led to an overshadowing of the role of the underground movement in the revolution, the role and the heroism of thousands of young people who sacrificed their lives and struggled in extremely harsh conditions. We must also point out the fact that in the history of our revolutionary movement, as

in all similar processes, and mainly in new historical phenomena, at the outset there was a lack of clarity concerning the role of the guerrilla movement and that of the underground struggle. No doubt even many revolutionaries regarded the guerrilla movement as a symbol supporting the flame of revolution and popular hopes as well as weakening the tyranny, but believed that in the final result it would be a general uprising which would bring about the overthrow of the dictatorship. I would like to emphasise, however, that given the existence in the revolutionary movement of various criteria and points of view—a phenomenon, in our opinion, both natural and logical—nobody could make claims to possession of the truth. We, for our part, relied on the victory of the guerrilla movement, but if events had developed in such a way that before the guerrilla movement had sufficiently developed to defeat the army, a popular uprising succeeded in one of the cities, we were prepared to give such an uprising our immediate support and to take part in it. I mean to say that in the revolutionary process there could be a number of alternatives and that it was necessary simply to be prepared to use each and every one of them.”

It must be remembered that the rank-and-file guerrillas fighting heroically in the mountains and valleys on the whole maintained correct views on the goals and tasks of the revolution, and the militant revolutionary spirit among them grew steadily. After victory they fought for the creation of a united revolutionary party under the direct leadership of Fidel. The July 26 Movement group united its efforts with those of student organisations and the *Partido Socialista Popular* of Cuba. The outcome was the establishment of a united struggle front.

The fall of the Batista regime was delayed primarily because the United States continued to provide it financial, political and military aid. Despite the tyrant's growing political isolation the US ruling circles continued to place their bets on their minion. Although in March 1958 the US Government proclaimed an embargo on weapon deliveries to Batista, in fact it continued to supply the dictatorship, providing it with napalm, missiles and other ware. Batista's airplanes bombing the insurgents were refueled and reloaded at the American military base in Guantánamo until the end of 1958. The US Government refused to withdraw its military mission from Cuba. This mission directed military operations behind Batista's back, despite the fact that the

standing agreement obliged the USA to recall its military advisers in the event of "civil war in Cuba". Just as vicious a role was played by Washington's espionage service, to which Batista's apparatus of repression was subordinated.

Not being quite sure to retain "our man in Havana" Americans hoped to at least replace him by an equally subservient puppet. According to the constitution (statute) proclaimed by Batista, new presidential elections were to be held at the end of 1958. Batista stood behind his prime minister, Riva Agüero, as candidate for this post. There was little doubt who would emerge "victorious" in these "elections".

Fidel Castro and his supporters had to demonstrate particular flexibility and political tact. On the one hand they had to avoid giving cause for direct military intervention by the USA in Cuban affairs under the pretext of fending off a communist victory, on the other—to prevent the replacement of Batista by another puppet, an act which would ensure the continuance of the same tyrannical regime. Fidel succeeded, for, as Che noted, he demonstrated himself to be a superb politician who only partially revealed his genuine plans and misled the Washington strategists by his seeming moderation. After all, nobody in the Sierra Maestra mentioned anything about socialism, and even less about communism. At the time the radical reforms proposed by the rebels, such as the liquidation of the latifundia and the nationalisation of transport, the electric companies and other branches of social import, aroused no noticeable fear among the Americans. Such reforms had been promised countless times before by bourgeois politicians, including Batista.

American specialists on Cuba were convinced that if the inevitable took place and Fidel Castro emerged victorious, they could reach an "agreement" with him as they had with other reformers of a bourgeois stripe. Washington strategists knew that in the twentieth century alone there had been no less than 80 "revolutions" in Latin America while US influence in this region had in no way diminished but actually increased. It seemed that only a suicide could seriously hope to drive Yankee capital from any given Latin American republic. This applied even more so for Cuba which was located just by—in fact under the heel of—its northern "patron". Well, they thought, if Fidel wants to end his own life, so much the worse for him. There in a nutshell were Washington's thoughts on Cuba.

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Early in March 1958 the column under the command of Raúl descended the mountains by order of Fidel Castro and seizing trucks, by some miracle made their way through a region swarming with Batista's troops, to the spurs of the Sierra del Cristal, where they opened a second front which they named after Frank País. Simultaneously, another column under the command of Almeida relocated in the eastern part of Oriente Province, where they also began successful military operations.

On March 12, 1958, the July 26 Movement issued a manifesto signed by Fidel Castro. The manifesto urged a general war against the dictatorship, forbade the payment of taxes to the Batista government after April 1 and appealed to the enemy troops to revolt and join the rebels. The manifesto urged the people to take part in a country-wide strike against the dictatorship.

The strike set for April 9, however, did not come off. Che wrote of this and subsequent events in the *Episodes*:

"April 9 arrived and all our efforts turned out to be in vain. The national leadership of the July 26 Movement, completely ignoring the principles of mass struggle, tried to begin the strike unexpectedly, to open fire without warning, which resulted in the refusal of workers to strike and the deaths of many remarkable people. April 9 was a crashing failure, which in no way shook the regime's foundations.

"What is more, having crushed the strike, the government could release a portion of its troops and gradually send them into Oriente Province to liquidate the rebels in the Sierra Maestra. We were forced to erect a defence, retreat farther into the mountains and the government continued to build up its forces and concentrate them on our positions. Finally the number of Batista's troops swelled to 10 thousand and on May 25 the government began an offensive in the vicinity of the settlement of Las Mercedes, where our advance positions were located. Our men held out courageously for two days against odds of 1:10 or 1:15. Moreover the army employed mortars, tanks and aviation. Our small group was forced to withdraw from the settlement.

"Meanwhile the enemy stepped up the offensive. In two and a half months of stubborn fighting the foe lost more than a thousand soldiers in casualties and desertions. Batista's army broke its back in this final offensive against the Sierra Maestra, but it still was not defeated...."



Batista's troops could not subdue the Sierra Maestra, nor could they handle the second front operating in the valley under the command of Raúl Castro. In the second half of 1958 the rebels' second front controlled a territory of 12 thousand square kilometres in the northeast of Oriente Province. Within this area a new revolutionary order was established: 200 schools and 300 preparatory classes for pre-school age children functioned, taxes were collected. There were also a radio station and telephone network in operation as well as 7 landing strips, 12 hospitals, revolutionary courts. A newspaper circulated and an agrarian reform was being carried out....

The inability of the army to cope with the rebels foreshadowed the ultimate collapse of the dictatorship. Some of the tyrant's retinue began to wonder how to get rid of Batista without risking their own posts and privileges. General Cantillo, troop commander in Oriente, suggested to Fidel the removal from power of Batista and his replacement by a new dictator—Cantillo offered himself for the role. Fidel received Cantillo's envoy in the presence of Che and told him that he could agree only with the complete transfer of power to the rebels. He demanded that Cantillo arrest Batista and his other satraps to be tried in court. The only way to dispose of a dictatorial regime was through a victory over its troops, not a palace revolution.

In August the political as well as the military situation of the rebels improved markedly again. The *Partido Socialista Popular* established contact with the guerrilla command. The Sierra Maestra was host to Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, member of the Politbureau of the *Partido Socialista Popular*, and to other Communists, who had behind them years of struggle against dictatorship and imperialism. Fidel and Che welcomed cooperation with the Communists, considering that it would strengthen the front of anti-Batista forces and give it a more sharply defined anti-imperialist direction, although among the supporters of the July 26 Movement there were many who still distrusted the Communists.<sup>1</sup>

The hour of victory over the Batista tyranny was approaching....

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<sup>1</sup> The enemies of the Cuban Revolution have written numerous legends and provocative falsehoods concerning the communists' attitude to the July 26 Movement and especially to Fidel Castro's rebels. Batista, for example, asserted

## Through Santa Clara to Havana

From an order of Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro:

**"Major Ernesto Guevara is given the following assignment: lead the rebel column from the Sierra Maestra to the province of Las Villas and operate in above territory in accordance with the strategic plan of the Rebel Army.**

**"Sierra Maestra,**

**"August 21, 1958, 21:00"**

In the middle of August 1958 the Commander-in-Chief of the Rebel Army Fidel Castro worked out a general plan for the offensive which was to lead to the collapse of the Batista regime. The plan was bold and daring, but strategically sound and politically anchored. To be sure, Batista still had an army 20 thousand strong and armed with tanks, airplanes and other hardware which the USA continued to deliver. The tyrant had half a dozen or so intelligence and counter-intelligence agencies, thousands of police and informers, and special punitive units. Behind the backs of the executioners loomed the figures of the "knights of the cloak and dagger"—advisers from the CIA and FBI. Batista had hundreds of millions of dollars. Meanwhile the rebels had but a few hundred poorly armed soldiers. Their hopes to snatch victory—how could they be anything but chimerical? No, this time their estimations were correct, the tally would be decided in favour of the revolutionaries.

Of course Batista had the scales of force weighted in his advantage. But weapons without people ready to use them are but scrap iron; the *casquitos* were but a shadow of their selves of 2 years

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that Fidel Castro was a "secret Communist"; others talked about allegedly hostile relationship between the Communists and the rebels. In reality both of these forces were already then fighting for the same ideals. They were employing different but mutually complementary means.

During the revolutionary struggle against Batista differences of point of view separating these two forces were overcome and close cooperation established between them, a contact which finally resulted in the formation of a united Marxist-Leninist party.

ago. Now they knew that the struggle with the insurgents was no partridge hunt, that fighting them they were risking their lives. Batista's soldiers demonstrated less and less willingness to fight and die for him. Among the officer corps dissatisfaction was also growing. Officers blamed their failures in the war against the rebels on Batista. They accused him of cowardice—after all, he had yet to visit the front and didn't dare travel even to Santiago. Cuban society was weary of the terror and lawlessness, of the embezzlement of state funds and arbitrary actions of the authorities. By now no one believed in the ability of the tyrant to retain power. Even the church closed ranks against him, as did the planters and the sugar magnates who paid taxes to Fidel, fearing to find their property ablaze. The former allies of the dictator felt no desire to accompany him to the bottom. Even among the ruling circles in the United States more and more voices could be heard calling for parting company with "our man in Havana". And truly, who needed this former sergeant if he could not guarantee "peace and quiet" on Treasure Island, as American monopoly pirates had always looked upon Cuba.

The strength of the rebels was growing, both in numbers and, even more so, in the sympathy extended by all segments of the population and particularly by the workers and peasants. Now everywhere the peasants were giving their support, and the majority of soldiers in the ranks of the rebel troops were *guajiros*. The peasants were convinced with the rebels they had found their first true defenders and honest friends. Support was also coming from workers, students, the intelligentsia and various bourgeois circles. To be sure, the latter were not without ulterior motive. Even the clergy found their way to the remote headquarters in the Sierra Maestra to pay their respects to Fidel. He was besieged by local and foreign journalists. Among these journalists were those doubling as agents of the CIA. Their task was to clarify the degree of Fidel's radicalism, sniff out his mood and learn whether Washington could come to terms with him if worse came to worst and Fidel actually gained power. But even the presence of CIA agents in the mountains indicated the growing popularity and authority of this guerrilla leader, this Robin Hood of the twentieth century, this fighter for justice and freedom whose very name was surrounded with legends.

What was this new strategic plan drawn up by Fidel Castro? To a certain degree it brought to mind the actions of the

*mambises*—Cuban patriots who fought against the Spanish colonisers. According to the plan the column under the command of Fidel and that under Raúl were to surround and take the city of Santiago. Column No. 2 under Camilo Cienfuegos was to locate in the western section of the island in the province of Pinar del Río and begin military operations there. Finally the column under Che, which was given the number Eight and named after the heroic captain Ciro Redondo, was assigned the task of breaking through into the province of Las Villas in the centre of the island. Column No. 8 was to take Santa Clara, the capital of the province, and from there advance upon Havana. At the same time Camilo Cienfuegos' force was to move on the capital from the west. Che's was the most difficult of missions. The complexity stemmed not simply from the heavy enemy troop concentrations but also from the fact that other armed and rivalling anti-Batista groupings were active in this region which they considered their zone of influence. Che was to bring solidarity to these splintered groupings, coordinate their actions, and overcoming their anti-communist prejudices ensure their cooperation with the *Partido Socialista Popular*, which had an armed unit in this area.

By order of Fidel Che was appointed "commander of all rebel forces active in the province of Las Villas, in both rural and urban quarters". He was given the responsibility of introducing the tax collections established by the rebel authorities and directing these funds to military needs; of ensuring the functioning of justice in conformity with the statutes of the criminal code; of carrying through the agrarian laws of the Rebel Army in the territories under its control; of coordinating military operations, plans and administrative and military decrees with those revolutionary forces in the province that could be brought together to establish a united army to consolidate the military efforts of the revolution; and of organising military units on the spot and appointing officers to various posts up to commander of a column.

Receiving this order, Che supplemented his column with graduates of the guerrilla school in the mountain village of Minas del Frio which he had established and directed. He warned his soldiers: "I don't want any sheep who run away at the sound of an airplane!"

The soldiers were given the best weapons at the disposal of the partisan forces.

On August 27, Che gathered his officers in the village of El

Jíbaro and told them that the column was to leave the mountains and fight in the valley. He left the details of their mission unclear. Che told the officers: "It's possible that half of the troops will perish in battle. But even if only one of us remains alive, this will ensure that the task assigned us by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro will be carried out. Whoever doesn't want to take the risk may leave the column. He won't be branded a coward." A few decided to remain in the mountains, but the overwhelming majority expressed their willingness to take part.

It was assumed that Che's detachment, making use of trucks as Raúl's soldiers had done, and travelling by rural roads, could push into Las Villas Province in four days. However, Che had no luck.

On August 30, the Eighth Column left the mountains for the region of Manzanillo where lorries were waiting for them, and an airplane was to land at an improvised air strip with a delivery of weapons and ammunition from abroad. The airplane landed but the enemy discovered the rebels and brought the air strip and the surrounding zone under artillery fire. The heavy fire continued through the night and by morning the foe had reached the air strip. Che ordered the destruction of the plane, fearing that it would fall into enemy hands. The trucks also had to be destroyed for Batista's forces had managed to seize the rebels' petrol truck, depriving the partisans of fuel. Despite this defeat Che led his unit to the west, hoping to obtain trucks on the Central Highway on the stretch between Manzanillo and Bayamo.

As it turned out the guerrillas managed to find vehicles on the spot but couldn't actually make use of them, for a furious cyclone descended upon the area and obliterated the unpaved roads. It was too risky to travel along the Central Highway guarded by a powerful enemy force.

"We had to give up the lorries," recalled Che. "From that time on we made our way on horseback or by foot. Day after day passed and the going got more and more difficult despite the fact that we were travelling through Oriente, which was friendly territory. We had to ford rivers and streams which had flooded their banks and turned into raging currents, trying to keep our weapons and ammunition dry. We had to search for fresh changes of our mounts. As we gained distance from Oriente Province we tried to avoid settlements."

On September 9, the advance guard of Che's detachment fell into an ambush in a place known as La Federal. Although they

managed to annihilate the ambush party, killing two and taking five prisoners, two of their own were killed and five wounded. Now the guerrillas had been discovered by the enemy, who began to pursue them closely.

Soon Cienfuegos' unit, moving in a parallel direction, joined up with Che and the two columns marched together for a distance, repulsing the relentless attacks by Batista's troops and aircraft.

The partisans then passed through a swampy, unsettled lowland where they were pursued by clouds of mosquitos which were harder to drive off than Batista's soldiers.

At one point they heard a radio broadcast in which the Chief of the General Staff, General Tabernilla, announced that his troops had crushed "Che Guevara's hordes". This chest-thumping by one of Batista's satraps caused merriment among the men, but their general spirit did not improve much.

"Dejection," wrote Che, "gradually took hold of the soldiers. Hunger and thirst, exhaustion and a feeling of impotence in the face of the enemy, who with every day tightened the encirclement, and above all a terrible foot disease known to the peasants as *mazamorra* that made every step an indescribable torment—all this turned us into shadows of former selves. We advanced with a difficulty, with a great difficulty. Every day the physical condition of the troops became worse and the scanty fare did nothing to improve their pitiful state.

"The most difficult days occurred when we were surrounded in the region of the Baragua sugar refining factory. We were driven into a fetid swamp and left without a drop of potable water. We were constantly under attack from the sky. We were left without a single horse to carry our most debilitated comrades through the forbidding mountains. Our boots simply disintegrated in the murky salt water. Prickly grass tore at our exposed feet. Our situation was truly disastrous until with tremendous effort we managed to break out of the encirclement and reach the famous path leading from Júcaro to Morón, a place much celebrated in history. It was at this spot in the last century that a bloody battle took place during the war of independence between the Cuban patriots and the Spanish forces. We had just managed to come to our senses when a downpour drenched us. To make matters worse the enemy continued to pursue us, forcing us to move along once again. Fatigue overwhelmed the soldiers and their spirits dropped lower and lower. However, just when the situation seemed hope-

less, when only insult, entreaty or obscenity could force the exhausted men to continue moving, we saw something in the distance which infused new life and strength in the guerrillas: in the west glittered the snowcovered peaks of the Las Villas range."

In his description of the difficult passage, Che, as was his habit, passed over in silence his own sufferings during these trying days. Once, when the column was on the march Che suddenly fell like a dead weight. His companions rushed to him, thinking he was dead. Actually, he was in a dead sleep, knocked out by sheer exhaustion.

Sharing all the deprivations suffered by his men, yet burdened with attacks of asthma as well, Che could not allow himself to complain or show displeasure to his companions. As a commander he had to encourage his men, build up their will to resist and instill confidence in victory. He could not permit himself even a hint of weakness. His exemplary behaviour rallied his men around him and earned him their respect.

Batista ordered his troops to make an allout attempt to intercept and destroy the Eighth Column in the region of Camagüey. The commander of the troops in this province wrote in a secret instruction dated October 6, that he was ready to work "around the clock, without breakfast, dinner or sleep" in order to block the path of Che's "hordes", and called upon his subordinates to follow his "gallant" example. "They won't get through!" boasted the old warhorse. "The rebels are only ignorant *guajiros*, armed with antediluvian weapons. Taking care of them will be like fighting babes in arms." Meanwhile the same commander complained: "It's as if we've been affected by atomic radiation, we fear these ignorant brigands so!" This strategist did not, however, succeed in overcoming the fear and rallying his men to bold exploits.

On October 16, the Eighth Column, now some 600 kilometres from the Sierra Maestra, finally reached the long-desired Escambray Mountains. This in itself was a major victory for the rebels and a palpable blow against the authority of Batista and his large army which, despite the advantage of aircraft and other ware, could not prevent the passage of Che's troops. Damage was also done to the reputation of the US military advisers who had been the real leaders of the government military operations.

Che noted that it may seem strange or incomprehensible that his column and that of Cienfuegos, numbering in all slightly more than 200 men, dressed in rags, famished and dropping from

exhaustion, could make their way through powerful detachments of soldiers armed to the teeth. In explanation Che pointed to the circumstance that the rebels regarded the burdens of guerrilla life as a prerequisite of victory, and risks to their lives as a normal, daily occurrence. In contrast the *casquitos* loved and valued living more than they did their “buddy”, the former sergeant Fulgencio Batista, and they had no overpowering wish to die for him.

But the main explanation of the success of the rebels’ march, Che underscored, was that they were heralds of agrarian reform and promised land for the peasants. They not only promised but divided up the property of the latifundistas—notably their stock—among the peasants. “Our first action in Las Villas Province, even preceding the opening of the first public school, was the promulgation of a revolutionary agrarian reform law, freeing the smallholders from rent payments to the landowners. This law was not of our own invention, the peasants themselves pressed it upon us.”

In his narration of the deprivations and difficult trials along the route to Las Villas, Che emphasised that everywhere the peasants gave the guerrillas help, shared their bread and acted as guides. But there were also incidents of treachery, although, Che cautioned, they were not of a deliberate nature. The fact of the matter was that certain peasants, fearful of repression, reported the presence of guerrillas to their landlords, and the latter immediately relayed the information to the military authorities. All guerrilla movements are confronted with such unthinking informers and the Cuban Revolution was no exception in this respect.

At the approaches to the Escambray Mountains, in the village of El Pedrero, Che met the young Aleida March, an underground worker from the July 26 Movement who selflessly aided the guerrillas. Aleida asked Che to allow her to join the column. Che liked this courageous and patriotic girl ready to pick up a weapon to fight for freedom and justice. He accepted Aleida in the ranks.

Che’s column set out from El Pedrero in the direction of the Escambray. Here, as has been said above, there were several guerrilla groups in operation. One of them had given itself the imposing title of Second National Front of Escambray and was headed by Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo<sup>1</sup> who had earlier belonged to

<sup>1</sup> Menoyo took part in the Civil War in Spain. Returning to Cuba he participated in the assault on the presidential palace on March 13, 1957, but after



the Revolutionary Student Directorate but had broken away and taken an extreme rightist, anti-communist position. He devoted himself more to marauding than to fighting Batista's soldiers. A Revolutionary Directorate group was also active in the area. It was headed by Faure Chaumon, the leader of the Directorate and a participant in the assault upon the presidential palace on March 13, 1957. The *Partido Socialista Popular* had a partisan detachment under the command of the Communist Félix Tórres.

There is an entry in Camilo Cienfuegos' diary concerning Tórres' detachment named after Máximo Gómez, a hero of the liberation war against the Spanish. The entry reads: "We arrived at a very well organised camp (in the Escambray zone) under the charge of Señor Félix Tórres. From the very start he demonstrated the utmost interest in cooperating with and aiding us. Soon after arriving we felt ourselves among brothers, as if in the Sierra Maestra. We were given the warmest welcome."

Faure Chaumon and his soldiers of the Revolutionary Directorate gave just as cordial a welcome to Che's *barbudos*.

With the leader of the Second Front, Gutiérrez Menoyo, it was a different story. He even tried to prevent Che's entry into the mountains, declaring that it was "his territory". Menoyo loathed the idea of agrarian reform advocated by Che. Of all the proposals by the rebels the agrarian reform proclaimed by Fidel in the Sierra Maestra on October 20 (Law No. 3 of the Rebel Command) caused the most irritation among reactionaries. Even among the leaders of the July 26 Movement in Las Villas Province not all voices were in favour of radical agrarian reform, that is the division of gentry land among the peasantry as advocated by Che. Some demurred from what they called tactical considerations, arguing that agrarian reform would alienate the prosperous from the rebels. Others were in direct opposition, because they themselves were landowners or capitalists and feared that agrarian reform would only spell the beginning of other, more radical social changes.

We are in agreement with agrarian reform, reasoned these pseudo-revolutionaries, but it must be rational, economically profitable, hence gradual. Radical reform, they insisted, could only bring about economic chaos, alienate all sides, and threaten the success of the revolution.

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1959 became a leader of the counter-revolutionaries and a flagrant anti-communist.

This was the argument of Sierra<sup>1</sup>, the leader of the July 26 Movement in Las Villas. At his very first meeting with Che in the Escambray, Sierra expressed this view and received a fair lambasting in return.

Connected with the local rich, Sierra was unfavourably disposed towards an armed struggle against Batista. In any case, until the arrival of Che's column the July 26 Movement had no armed unit whatsoever in the Escambray.

In 1958, people of the same disposition as Sierra viewed Che as a foreign element in the July 26 Movement. He provoked their antipathy and fear.

Here is Sierra's description of his first meeting and conversation with Che: "We approached one another. I had an image of Che drawn from the occasional photographs in the newspapers. But as it turned out not one of these photographs fit the original. Here was a thick-set fellow in a beret, from under which tumbled extremely long hair. A sparse beard. On his shoulders was a black raincoat over a shirt open at the neck. The campfire shadows and his moustache gave Che Chinese features. I thought of Genghis Khan. The uneven light thrown off by the fire danced over his face, adding a most unexpected, fantastic expression to it."

This "ominous" figure began on the spot to point out the urgency of agrarian reform.

According to Sierra, the following conversation took place: " 'When we expand and consolidate our territory', said Che, 'we will carry out an agrarian reform, giving the land to those who till it. What do you think about agrarian reform?'

" 'It is necessary,' I answered. Che's eyes were burning. 'Without agrarian reform there can be no economic progress!'

" 'Nor social,' Che interrupted me.

" 'Of course. I've written the section on agrarian reform for our movement's programme.'

" 'Is that so? And what are the contents?'

" 'All untilled land must be given to the *guajiros*. Heavy taxes must be imposed on the latifundia so that this land may be bought out with the money of the owners. It should then be sold to the *guajiros* at its real value and, if necessary, in staggered payments

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra was the party sobriquet of the writer and political figure Enrique Oltusky. He held the position of Minister of Transport in the José Miró Cardona government, then worked in various government departments.

supplemented by credits allowing them to rationalise production.'

" 'But that's a reactionary proposition,' Che boiled with indignation. 'How can we *sell* the land to the tiller? You're just like all those in the valley.'

"I lost my temper: 'Damn it, what do you want! To give them the land free? So that they can spoil it as they did in Mexico?'<sup>1</sup> A person has to understand that what is given him costs effort.'

" 'What a son of a bitch you are!' shouted Che, the veins in his neck bulging.

"We argued without respite.

" 'Moreover,' I indicated, 'we must conceal our actions. Don't think that the Americans will sit idle while we carry out our plans. You have to confuse them.'

" 'So, you're one of those who feel that we have to make a revolution while hiding behind the backs of the Americans? What a shit you are! Our revolution from the very outset must develop in a struggle to the death with imperialism. Genuine revolution cannot be concealed.' "

In order to fill the empty coffers of the rebels Che ordered Sierra to hold up a bank in Sancti Spiritus. Che, of course, had read Marx's work on the Paris Commune and remembered his criticism of the communards for not touching the gold preserved in the vaults of the French National Bank. Che had no intention of repeating the mistakes of the communards. However, Sierra firmly refused to carry out the order, arguing that such expropriation would alienate the prosperous from the July 26 Movement.

On November 3, 1958, Che wrote him a trenchant letter in reply: "I could ask you why all the *guajiros* approve our demands of all land to the tiller? Can this really be totally separated from the fact that the bulk of the rebels agree with the expropriation of banks where they don't have a damn centavo on account? Have you never given any thought to the economic reasons for this attitude towards the most pilfering of all financial institutions? Those who grow fat on usury and profiteering do not deserve even normal human consideration. The miserable sum they hand out is no more than the rake-off they make in one day of exploitation,

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<sup>1</sup> Sierra is referring to the agrarian reform implemented by President Cárdenas (1934-1940) in Mexico. He is parroting the argument of Mexican reactionaries who alleged that the distribution of land among the peasants led to a decline in agricultural production.

while at the same time the long-suffering people in the mountains and valleys are drained of their life blood and are the daily victims of betrayal on the part of their perfidious leaders.”

Che had to overcome many an obstacle before gaining the cooperation of Sierra and his companions and uniting the revolutionary forces active in the Escambray. Menoyo's band had to be excluded from the common front. Che explained the reasons in a letter dated November 7, 1958 and addressed to Faure Chaumon of the Revolutionary Directorate:

“The difficulties which arose between us and the so-called Second Front organisation reached a critical state after the release of a circular by our Commander in Chief, Dr. Fidel Castro. [The circular called for a boycott of the elections announced by Batista—*Author.*] These difficulties now turned into a direct attack against one of my commanders whose units were located in the zone of San Blas. Such conduct makes an agreement with the above-mentioned impossible.”

In the same letter Che noted that: “During the official negotiations with members of the *Partido Socialista Popular* the latter came out for a united policy and as proof of their good faith are ready to put at our disposal their organisations in the valley and their guerrillas active in Yaguajay.”

A few days later an agreement was signed to unite the activities of the July 26 Movement and the Revolutionary Directorate and appealing to all other anti-Batista forces to join them.

The only group to respond to this appeal was the *Partido Socialista Popular*. In an open letter dated December 9, 1958, the PSP wrote:

“Having duly considered this document, the *Partido Socialista Popular* gives the following reply:

“*First:* It accepts the appeal contained in the circular and is in open accord with it, understanding that the coordination of efforts is vitally necessary for the Cuban revolutionary and democratic movement. For more than six years we have held the opinion, unchanged today, that one of the factors contributing most to the survival of the tyranny to this day, has been the lack of contact between opposition forces, disunity and the absence of coordination in the actions of the country's revolutionary and democratic forces.

“*Second:* It accepts the guiding principles of coordination as proposed in the circular.

*“Third:* However, it feels that the following should be pointed out:

“The principles included in the circular must be considered as only preliminary, since by their very nature they must be supplemented by a number of ideas and specific programme propositions meeting the aspirations and legitimate demands of our people.

“The closer the unity, particularly in the armed struggle, the better the results will be. Therefore the Party is firmly convinced that all armed formations struggling at present against the tyranny must be brought together under a united command, not only in Las Villas but throughout the country.

*“Fourth:* We have already taken the necessary measures to join in the Escambray Pact and to ensure its effectiveness insofar as our actions are concerned.”

When unity of action among the basic revolutionary groupings was achieved, it became possible to take coordinated offensive actions. First in order of necessity was the interruption in Las Villas of the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections called for by the dictator Batista. Fidel Castro appealed for a boycott of this electoral farce. The revolutionary command issued a law stating that all who ran for nomination were committing treason. Those taking part in the voting would be stripped of civil rights. But this strict law published in the Sierra Maestra had to be given actual force through vigorous military actions against the dictatorship.

“Time was limited and our job immense,” wrote Che. “Camilo carried out his mission in the north, spreading terror among the supporters of the dictatorship. We had to attack the nearby settlements in order to disrupt the elections. We worked out a plan for simultaneous assaults on the towns of Cabaiguan, Fomento and Sancti Spiritus, located in the fertile valleys in the centre of the island. Meanwhile, a small garrison in Guinía de Miranda was wiped out and the barracks in Banao attacked. The days preceding November 3 were filled with activity. Our columns were mobilised everywhere. There were few localities where they could actually go to the polls.”

Batista's troops, now forced to fight on four fronts, with the columns under Che, Cienfuegos, Raúl and Fidel, were clearly in no state to undertake offensive operations. The *casquitos* were demoralised and intimidated, while many officers lost faith in the possibility of defeating the rebels, whose popularity and

authority were daily growing. However, in November Batista's army as a whole still presented a formidable threat. It still numbered thousands of soldiers equipped with modern weaponry while the overall number of the rebels did not exceed three figures. Cruel and sanguinary fighting was still ahead.

During the second half of December Che descended the Escambray Mountains at the head of his detachments and began an assault on the enemy strongholds in Las Villas as a preliminary to the liberation of Santa Clara, the capital of this province. On December 16, the rebels surrounded the town of Fomento (population 10,000). After two days of bitter fighting the garrison surrendered and the town was liberated. The rebels took 141 prisoners as well as capturing a large quantity of weapons, ammunition and vehicles.

On the heels of this victory on December 21 the rebels attacked the town of Cabaiguan (population 18,000). Here the fighting was literally house-to-house. During the fighting Che made an unlucky jump from the roof of a house and broke his left arm and severely injured his forehead. His arm was set in a cast in a local hospital and he returned to the fray, which ended with the capture of the enemy garrison. As was always the case, the rebels disarmed the enemy soldiers and officers and then released them. Unarmed and dishonoured by their surrender, these men no longer presented a threat. Moreover, such humane treatment encouraged others of Batista's soldiers to surrender. The weapons captured from the enemy were immediately given to the volunteers who at every settlement rushed in throngs to join the rebels.

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Since 1960 the author of this book has maintained a friendship with Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez. From the time he was a student Jiménez effectively participated in the anti-imperialist movement and was subjected to police persecution. When appointed professor in the University of Las Villas Núñez Jiménez wrote *Geografía de Cuba*, a book exposing the devastating consequences of imperialist dominance over the country. The censor prohibited this book, and the edition was burned by order of the dictator. Jiménez took to the underground, joined the July 26 Movement and enlisted in the Eighth Column, remaining with it throughout the campaign in Las Villas Province under the

direct leadership of Che. For his participation in the fighting he received the title of Captain in the Rebel Army. After the victory of the revolution Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez occupied a number of responsible posts: he directed the famous INRA—*Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, and in 1962 became President of the Cuban Academy of Sciences. He has been President of the Cuban-Soviet Friendship Society from the day of its founding. In 1960 Captain Jiménez led the first official Cuban delegation to visit the Soviet Union.

In 1968 and 1970, during visits to Cuba, the author had several conversations with Captain Jiménez on the subject of the Las Villas campaign. His description of events helps clarify exactly what happened in that time and highlights Che's leading role. Here is the course of events according to Captain Jiménez.

Early in the morning of December 22 the battle began for the city of Placetas, with a population of about 30 thousand and situated a mere 35 kilometres from Santa Clara. By evening the city garrison surrendered to the rebels.

In Placetas, on instruction from Che Jiménez wrote an appeal to the population, which was approved by the Eighth Column commander. The content of the appeal is of great interest, for it reflects Che's endeavour to consolidate the unity of the working people and bring about fundamental social changes, thus having the bourgeois allies of the July 26 Movement face an accomplished fact. We introduce the text of this appeal which was broadcast over a local radio station seized by the rebels:

"To the Cuban people:

"The glorious Revolutionary Army made up of soldiers of the July 26 Movement and the Revolutionary Directorate has liberated the city of Placetas and also taken after stiff fighting the towns of Fomento, Zulueta and Cabaiguan and other settlements which have suffered for many years under the barbarous yoke of the tyrannical regime led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista.

"This remarkable victory of the people against their oppressors must be consolidated with aid from all quarters through tightly-knit worker unity. Our army is one of peasants, workers, students and intellectuals, and our mission in addition to leading the struggle to overthrow the tyrant is to ensure universal democracy and freedom of thought and word, implement an agrarian reform with immediate redistribution of the land (as was done in the mountains of Oriente and Las Villas), eliminate the obligatory

trade-union dues [appropriated by Batista agents in the trade-union movement—*Author*], establish trade-union democracy, guarantee the fulfilment of the just demands of the workers and take all measures necessary to secure popular rights.

“People! On with the revolution! Worker! Rise to struggle! Peasant! Organise! The Revolutionary Army continues its unrestrainable and invincible attack and soon the entire province of Las Villas will be proclaimed the Liberated Territory of Cuba!”

The appeal concluded with salutes to the revolution, the agrarian reform, the revolutionary July 26 Movement, the Revolutionary Directorate, worker unity and to *Cuba Libre*.

Worker unity and agrarian reform were the key slogans advanced by Fidel and Che on the eve of victory, which, of course, could not warm the hearts of bourgeois politicians promoting arrant anti-communism.

After the liberation of Placetas the enemy bombed the city from the air, causing many deaths among the civilian population.

Meanwhile units of Che’s column surrounded the city of Sancti Spiritus, with its population of 115 thousand the second largest in Las Villas. The battle raged for two days before ending in victory for the rebels.

Losing no time Che put his men into trucks and headed towards the city of Remedios, situated on the road to Santa Clara. Here enemy troops were barricaded in massive buildings of the colonial era—the municipal centre, the prison, the police station and the barracks. Surrounding these buildings the rebels opened fire:

The first to surrender were the police in the flaming municipal centre. Then rebels led by Che seized the barracks by storm and took about 100 prisoners. This battle added another city to the liberated territory of Cuba. Fighting at Che’s side in the battle for Remedios were Aleida March, Captain Roberto Rodríguez (nick-named *Vaquero* or “Little Shepherd”) who led a shock platoon called the Death Platoon for the bravery of its soldiers.

The very same day, December 25, the rebels broke into the port of Caibarien, located eight kilometres from Remedios. After a brief battle the soldiers and sailors defending it surrendered. They were disarmed and sent home.

On the following day the Revolutionary Army liberated the



settlement of Camajuani and the garrison defending the town fled in panic in the direction of Santa Clara. The enemy abandoned other minor settlements as well, concentrating its forces in the vicinity of Santo Domingo, 70 kilometres to the west of Santa Clara, and at Esperanza, 16 kilometres to the east of the provincial capital. They hoped to delay the rebels' progress at these two points. Che ordered his troops to surround the garrisons located there.

At eight in the evening on December 27, 1958, Che gathered his commanders in a room in the Tullerías Hotel in Placetas and indicated that the time had come to undertake the decisive engagement for control of Santa Clara. Núñez Jiménez was ordered to lead the Eighth Column in secrecy along unpaved roads to the vicinity of the university campus Marta Abreu located a few kilometres from Santa Clara.

At 2 a.m. the Eighth Column under the command of Núñez Jiménez, in all about 300 men, loaded into vehicles and reached the campus in two hours flat where they were welcomed most enthusiastically by students, faculty and university personnel.

At 6.30 a.m. Che arrived at the campus. At 8 a.m. he gave the order to move upon Santa Clara along the Central Highway. The rebels moved on either side of the road, Che travelled in a jeep in between. With him were Aleida, Núñez Jiménez and his wife Lupe Veliz. Along the road they came under fire from an enemy whippet tank and then an aircraft.

Núñez Jiménez told Che that he had left his two-year-old daughter Maritere with friends in the suburb of Santa Clara through which the column was passing. Che accompanied Jiménez and Lupe as they visited their daughter to make sure everything was in order.

At noon on December 28, the column approached Cápiro Mountain overlooking Santa Clara. Enemy soldiers were dug in at the summit with two tanks positioned at the base. Nearby stood an armoured train fitted out with rockets, mortars, anti-aircraft artillery and machine guns. Over four hundred soldiers under Colonel Rossel Leyva, commander of Batista's engineer units, were planted in the train.

One would have thought that this fortified position could have withheld an insurgent assault. But Batista's men, a preponderance of strength, were demoralised, confused and the very mention of the name Che sent them into panic.

Along the route from Havana to Santa Clara the armoured train already lost dozens of soldiers by desertion. "I remember," said Blas Roca at the Eighth National Congress of the *Partido Socialista Popular* in 1960 "that when they sent the armoured train to Santa Clara we organised mass desertions among the soldiers, and I can tell you that we organised as many such desertions as we could find civilian outfits for them to change into when they left the train. The only restriction on the number of desertions was that imposed by the amount of civilian clothing we could find. This took place at every station all along the line where we had our organisation."

Batista's soldiers had no spirit for the fight. Firing a few times for the sake of appearances, their tanks retreated into the city and were followed by the *casquitos* whose defences on the summit of Cápiro crumpled under insurgent pressure. Colonel Rossel Leyva himself was reluctant to tangle in battle with Che's men, and fled too. By order of Leyva the armoured train raced back full steam in the direction of the Santa Clara station. What the colonel did not know was that a few hours earlier Che, obtaining two bulldozers had plowed up the rails at a point between Cápiro and Santa Clara and was waiting for him there.

At 3 p.m. on December 29 the train, moving at a high speed, ran off the rails on the damaged stretch. The engine and several wagons turned over. The din and thunder were straight from scenes of Judgement Day. "A very interesting battle developed," recalled Che. "We smoked the soldiers out of the train by tossing in petrol bombs. The train crew had a strong defence, but like the settlers who fought the Indians in the American West they could fight only at a respectable distance, holding a suitable position against a virtually unarmed enemy. Besieged at close quarters and pelted with petrol bombs, the train became a real hell for the soldiers confined within the reinforced walls that retained the heat given off by the bombs. A few hours later the entire outfit surrendered and we had on our hands 22 wagons, AA guns, machine-guns and an unbelievable stockpile of ammunition."

The entire rebel force in the operation was one platoon of 18 men, who not only put out of commission this armoured train, the only one at Batista's disposal, but also took more than 400 enemy soldiers and officers prisoner. Che allowed the officers to keep their own weapons and ordered Núñez Jiménez to escort all

prisoners to the port of Caibarien, from where they would be returned to government-controlled areas.

"We loaded the prisoners into trucks and hurried off with them to Caibarien, some 60 kilometres from Santa Clara," Núñez Jiménez said. "Although there were only three of us—two other rebels and I—the prisoners were so thunderstruck by the events around them that none of them even thought of trying to escape. In fact in their situation this would have been suicidal. The population greeted us ecstatically along the road, and heaped curses on the prisoners who had to be protected with no little effort on our part. In Caibarien I communicated by radio with the enemy on an armed frigate patrolling the coast. I invited them to the port to pick up our prisoners. The frigate's captain asked the General Headquarters in Havana for instructions, but the answer came back that the prisoners were regarded as wretched cowards and the rebels were free to deal with them as they wished. Consequently, the only thing left to do was to relocate the prisoners in the local naval club and entrust their future care to the people's militia. We then made haste to return to Santa Clara where bitter fighting continued."

Again the enemy barricaded themselves in the city's major buildings—the Leoncio Vidal barracks, the police station, the Grande Hotel, the court building, churches and other buildings protected by tanks. It was no easy task taking such strong points, the more so that such urban fighting threatened heavy civilian casualties, something the rebels naturally wanted to avoid. Batista's soldiers hoped to hold out in the city until promised reinforcements could arrive. Foreseeing that such reinforcements could be sent from Trinidad or Cienfuegos, Che ordered these towns surrounded, and thus isolated them from Santa Clara. Therefore, no reinforcements arrived to help the besieged forces in Santa Clara.

Command of the city's defence had been given to Colonel Casillas Lumpuy who, like his predecessor Major-General Chaviano removed from this post by Batista for cowardice, was guilty of numerous crimes against the patriots and notably of personally shooting the leader of the sugar plantation workers. Jesús Méndez. Lumpuy set up headquarters in the Leoncio Vidal barracks. However, as soon as the battle for the city began he secretly fled the barracks—only to be caught and shot by the rebels. His place was taken by Colonel Hernández.

On December 28, bitter clashes took place at the Court of Justice, the hotel, the prison, the police station and the Leoncio Vidal barracks. The city, wreathed in smoke, was the scene of ubiquitous shooting. The civilian population aided the rebels. Residents gladly opened their doors, gave them food and drink, led them along the roof-tops to the best positions, showed them where supporters of the dictator were hiding and reported on enemy movements. Che was besieged by dozens of people volunteering their services. With his left arm in a cast, the inevitable cigar in his mouth, a tommy-gun in his right hand and dressed in leather jacket, old boots and a black beret, Che listened to reports from his liaison men, gave orders and from time to time headed into the thick of battle to encourage the troops.

On December 29 and 30, the rebels took the court building, the Grande Hotel, two fortified churches (the Buen Viaje and the Cármen) and captured the soldiers and police holed up there.

The Court of Justice, recalled Jiménez, was defended by two tanks, that protected a group of soldiers pouring fire on the attackers. When the eighteen-year-old Captain Acevedo opened fire at the tanks three soldiers hiding behind them were wounded. But the men in the tanks did not bother to pick up their wounded comrades. In fact they put the tanks in reverse and crushed the helpless soldiers. Such brutality was in sharp contrast to conduct of the rebels, who never left the wounded, both friendly and hostile, without help, giving them first aid and despatching them as quickly as possible to the Red Cross field hospitals.

The tanks on which the enemy had pinned its hopes were in fact useless. In the rebel-held city they were stuck among barricades, overturned trucks and cars. The rebels attacked the tanks with petrol bombs and forced their crews to surrender. Batista's airplanes haphazardly bombed and strafed Santa Clara and other towns and settlements under rebel control.

A bloody engagement took place at the police station. The redoubtable Vaquerito, commander of the Death Platoon, perished there. After the rebels set fire to the building the entrapped agreed to surrender under the condition that they would be permitted to hide unarmed in the Leoncio Vidal barracks. Che agreed and about 300 men filed out of the building but only about ten of them holed up in the barracks, the remainder returned to their homes or otherwise made themselves scarce.

By January 1, 1959, only the prison, barracks and adjacent airport remained in the hands of the enemy. All attempts to send reinforcements to Santa Clara from Havana ended in failure. However, these barracks, which like all such installations in Cuba made up a well-fortified stronghold, still held roughly one thousand heavily armed soldiers and police. They could put up fierce resistance and make the rebels pay dearly for their victory. It was wiser to make this victory as swift and bloodless as possible. Indeed the taking of Santa Clara predetermined the outcome of the battles for Camagüey and Santiago, which in turn meant the liberation of the entire eastern part of the island, spelling the demise of Batista. Speed was all the more necessary because a bloody battle for the city could bring about armed intervention by the United States in Cuba under the traditional pretext of defending the lives and property of American citizens. The danger of American intervention was no mere chimera. To justify such action the reactionary American press were churning out falsehoods on how Soviet submarines were delivering weapons to Fidel's troops.

Considering all these circumstances Che on the morning of January 1 instructed Captains Núñez Jiménez and Rodríguez de la Vega to make their way into the Leoncio Vidal barracks and persuade the garrison to lay down their arms with the promise that both soldiers and officers would be permitted to disperse to their homes or go wherever they chose in Cuba.

The negotiators got into a vehicle displaying a white flag and, grabbing a bullhorn which they used to call for a ceasefire during the negotiations, set off in the direction of the enemy defences.

The *casquitos* greeted them with unconcealed relief and hope, crying: "Brothers! It's time to end the war. Peace! Peace!"

In the barracks Colonel Hernández and the entire command staff including 9 majors, 8 captains and Colonel Cornelio Rojas, police commander, awaited the arrival of the rebel captains. Colonel Hernández himself evinced no desire to continue the fighting. On October 5, he had lost a son during the suppression of an uprising in Cienfuegos. He had been wounded in the leg, which was still in a cast.

Hernández proposed a truce of unlimited duration.

The negotiators demanded unconditional surrender on Che's authority.

Núñez Jiménez told the officers: "You are completely sur-

rounded, our forces are in command of the situation in the city, and the population supports us. Your troops have been crushed in Oriente. The entire island is in the throes of uprisings. Under these conditions it would be a crime to continue the fighting."

Hernández nodded in agreement. But Rojas and some of the officers insisted on a truce with the excuse of wanting to consult the garrison.

Núñez Jiménez told them: "Señores! It is now 11.30. If you have not capitulated by 12.15 we shall open fire without warning. That's the order we have."

At that moment they heard a communiqué over the radio from the General Headquarters in Havana informing them that Batista had fled abroad to Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. At the Columbia military camp in Havana a government junta had been formed under the leadership of Piedra, a member of the Supreme Court, and General Eulogio Cantillo, acting as Chief of the General Staff.

Hernández went over to the radio transmitter and reported to Cantillo on the situation in Santa Clara and the presence of negotiators in the barracks.

Cantillo, addressing Núñez Jiménez, declared that he had taken power with Fidel Castro's consent, that since the garrison was now subordinated to him the rebels had no right to demand its capitulation. What had in fact happened? On December 24 Cantillo had secretly met with Fidel not far from Santiago and promised to arrest Batista and his cohorts on December 31. At the same time Cantillo committed himself to ending resistance to the rebels in Santiago and other cities, and to turn power over to them in all regions. The seizure of power in Havana was to be carried out by troops in conjunction with underground revolutionary units.

Cantillo betrayed this agreement. He had no intention to arrest Batista, and it was with his consent that he had met Fidel. Batista feverishly tried to gain time hoping for a US armed interference that would ward off the insurgent victory. With this in mind Batista hoped to convince Trujillo to bomb Cuban cities and land marines on Cuban soil, which would have given Washington a pretext to interfere in Cuban affairs. But nothing came of these machinations; they were undercut by the rebels' victory and above all by the success of the Eighth Column under Che in Las Villas Province.

On December 31, General Tabernilla, the Chief of the General Staff, reported to Batista that the army had lost all fighting capacity and that there was no possibility of halting the advance of the rebels on Havana. Cantillo gave a similar verdict. Batista realised that it was the end and ordered that his bags be packed—he had deposited his money in Swiss banks long before. His luggage included all kinds of “trifles”, objects dear to the heart of the dictator such as his pure gold telephone receiver and a silver bed pan, presents from grateful American businessmen. Thugs of a lower rank decided to flee with Batista—in all 124 generals, heads of the secret service and ministers. Batista chose Cantillo as his successor and appointed him Chief of the General Staff. Cantillo accompanied his patron to the airplane. “Don’t forget my instructions!” Batista menacingly reminded him before entering the airplane. But these instructions from the former dictator to conquer the rebels by ruse suffered the same fate as had the order to destroy them in the field of battle. While Batista had remained in power for seven years, his successor didn’t last around the clock.

On learning of events in the capital Fidel Castro immediately drew up a declaration condemning Cantillo’s coup and denouncing him as a collaborator and follower of Batista. Fidel appealed to the working people to declare a nationwide general strike until power was fully turned over to the rebels. At the same time the revolutionary leader summoned the rebel forces to a decisive offensive to crush seats of resistance and liberate Santiago, Camagüey and other cities. “Revolution—*si*! Military coup—*no*!” was how Fidel concluded his speech during the final period of the guerrilla war.

In the meantime, Jiménez replied to Cantillo: “It is impossible to call off the capitulation. Moreover, your announcement that your junta, which the people have nothing to do with, has the support of Major Fidel Castro—is a lie. Yesterday Fidel himself said in a radio conversation with Major Guevara that he resolutely denounced the military coup which would be a salvation for Batista and his allies.”

Cantillo began to heap abuse upon Núñez Jiménez. The conversation ended with Jiménez telling the new dictator to go to hell, then turning off the transmitter.

The officers witnessing all this were amazed both at the news of Batista’s flight and at the tone Jiménez used in speaking to the

one-time powerful satrap. Still, fearing for their lives, they didn't dare to put down their weapons yet and confess defeat. They requested that their representative Major Fernández continue the negotiations directly with Che.

The negotiators returned with Fernández to the command point to find Che. Fernández repeated the request for a truce, but Che gave a categorical refusal.

"Fire will be resumed at 12.30," Che announced to Fernández. "And we'll be shooting for real. Don't drag out the war. If your actions provoke an American intervention you'll all be guilty of treason and you'll end your days swinging on the gallows."

Che confirmed that in the event of immediate capitulation officers and soldiers living in Santa Clara would be allowed to return home. Those guilty of torture and other crimes would have to answer before a court for their deeds. All others could travel via Caibarien to the destination they chose.

Fernández returned to the barracks with these conditions and accompanied by the same negotiators. Along the route the city residents shouted out welcomes in honour of the Rebel Army, Fidel and Che and demanded that Batista and his thugs be punished.

"Everything is lost. We surrender," Colonel Hernández said when Fernández reported on his conversation with Che.

Other points of resistance fell soon after the surrender of the Leoncio Vidal barracks. By 2 p.m. on January 1, 1959, Santa Clara was fully in the hands of the rebels.

Che reported the victory by telephone to Fidel who was making preparations for the decisive assault on Santiago. Fidel ordered Che and Cienfuegos to advance at a forced march to Havana, topple Cantillo and occupy the basic strategic points in the city.

Meanwhile, frightened by the wave of protest, Cantillo "deposed himself", turning over power to Colonel Ramón Barquín, leader of the conspiracy against Batista in April 1956 and since that time confined in prison on the Isle of Pines. Now released by request of the US Ambassador, this former military attaché to Washington was a fully acceptable figure for the Yankees. Barquín readily agreed to the role of Batista's successor. He sent a cable to Fidel proposing the joint formation of a government. But not a day had passed before Barquín joined Cantillo in the dustbin of history.



On January 2, 1959, residents of Santa Clara read Che's notice entitled "To the Citizens of Las Villas Province":

"Leaving the city and the province to perform new tasks assigned to me by the Supreme Command of the Rebel Army I extend my profound gratitude to the population of the city and the entire province which made a major contribution to the revolutionary cause and on whose land many of the most important and conclusive battles against the tyrant were fought. I ask you to give broad support to Comrade Captain Calixto Morales—the representative of the Rebel Army in Las Villas, to aid him in normalising life as quickly as possible in this much-suffering province.

"Let the population of Las Villas Province know that our column has expanded considerably through enlistments by the sons of this land, and that we are leaving with a feeling of profound love and gratitude. I appeal to you to preserve in your hearts the revolutionary spirit so that when carrying out the massive job of restoration the people of Las Villas will be the vanguard and bulwark of the revolution."

On the same day, at 5.30 a.m., the *Ciro Redondo* Column No. 8 led by the Argentine physician Ernesto Guevara Serna, a famous commander nicknamed Che, loaded into trucks, cars and cross-country vehicles and headed for Havana. Along the road people greeted the rebels exuberantly, strewing flowers in their path. The Eighth Column was met with the same degree of enthusiasm by the residents of the capital where it arrived at noon.

When the crowds asked him to stop and give speeches Che shook his head in refusal. He was in a hurry. He was impatient to carry out Fidel's order and occupy La Cabaña, the combined fortress and prison built by the Spaniards at the entrance to Havana Harbour. There were still *casquitos* holed up there.

The fortress surrendered to Che without a single shot.

On the same January 2, 1959, Cienfuegos' column advanced just as rapidly upon Havana and took, also without fighting, the Columbia military base, where Batista's crack troops surrendered to them.

The *barbudos* had triumphed.

Now friends and enemies asked themselves what would happen next.

# **“Patria o Muerte!”**

## **In the Whirlwind of Revolution**

**You who stand by the seashore,  
you who stand firmly on guard,  
note, you maritime guardian,  
note the sharp points of the lances  
and the thunder of great waves breaking  
and the flames that rise up roaring  
and the lizard now awakened,  
from the map its claws withdrawing;  
long is that lizard and verdant,  
with eyes of stones and of water.**

**Nicolás Guillén**

Everything about this revolution was unusual, unexpected and so unlike those revolutions which occasionally disturbed the political climate in the Latin American countries and which bring to mind the old French saying: “*Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*” (The more the change, the more everything remains the same).

These rebels were of a different cut—bearded, with long abundant heads of hair, gun-toting and wearing amulets. Their leaders were young, handsome, intelligent and outrageously courageous. And they didn’t act like the run-of-the-mill Latin American “knights of success”, they seemed to be seriously bent on extirpating venality, corruption and other rot and making of Cuba the most progressive country on the continent.

Such plans might well have seemed pure fantasy to the sober observer, for in order to change Cuba it was necessary to liberate her from “tutelage” and the economic control of American monopolies. But the latter task was far more formidable than that of overthrowing Batista.

January 2, 1959, Che’s first day in Havana, was one of both rejoicing and alarm. The population of the capital met the liberators with overwhelming joy, the dictator and his closest associates fled, and the Havana garrison and police offered no resistance;

but the enemy still hoped for retaining power if not by force then by cunning.

During the early morning hours of January 2, riots and looting swept the capital. Supporters of Batista lurked about in the city. General Cantillo and Colonel Barquín went underground still hoping to become masters of the situation with the help of their American patrons.

Other groupings were making a bid for power. Trying to secure their positions, supporters of the Revolutionary Student Directorate seized the presidential palace and the University campus in Havana.

A day later the rebels in Santiago proclaimed Judge Manuel Urrutia provisional president of the republic. As member of the tribunal hearing the proceedings against Fidel and other participants in the attack on the Moncada barracks Urrutia had come out for their release and since that time had been regarded as an opponent of Batista.

In the meantime in Havana Che and Camilo endeavoured to unify the revolutionary forces and disarm army units and the police. In his first speech over television Che pointed to the necessity of establishing a revolutionary militia to replace the old police force. With the help of the population the rebels flushed out Batista's henchmen and confined them in La Cabaña under guard of Eighth Column soldiers.

On January 3 the leader of the Socialist Party of Chile Salvador Allende while passing through Cuba arranged, with the help of Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a meeting with Che at La Cabaña. After the victory of the revolution this was Che's first contact with a leading representative of the Latin American national liberation movement. Seven years earlier it had been by recommendation of Allende that Che was able to leave Ecuador for Guatemala. Now his odyssey throughout Latin America ended in Havana, a city completely unfamiliar to him, whose fate to a certain measure now rested in his hands.

Che produced a powerful impression on Allende. The latter, himself a doctor by profession, was particularly struck by the fact that this famous rebel commander suffered from a serious case of asthma.

Allende described their meeting: "In large quarters turned into a bedroom and filled with books a man lay on a fold-up bed. He was naked to the waist, dressed only in olive-green trousers,

holding an inhaler and gazing piercingly at me. He gestured for me to wait until he could bring an intense attack of asthma under control. I watched him for a few moments, noticing the feverish glint in his eyes. Flat on his back before me was one of America's greatest fighters, struck down by a severe illness. When we talked he noted without self-pity that throughout the insurrectionary war this asthma had given him no peace. Watching and listening to him, I thought of the pathos of this human, who had been called upon to perform great deeds while suffering from this relentless, pitiless disease."

Another visitor to this cottage which but a few days earlier had been the residence of the Batista-appointed commander of La Cabaña, was *Pravda* correspondent Vasili Chichkov who wrote in his book *Dawn Over Cuba*:

"Guevara's room was small, perhaps 12 square metres in all. Two iron-frame beds stood against the wall and between them were a commode and an antique mirror. On the commode were scattered odd official papers and a number of long, fat cigars....

"Guevara was sitting up in one of the beds. He was dressed in green trousers, a white sleeveless T-shirt and was barefoot. A tommy-gun, a pistol and other equipment hung on a large nail driven into the wall....

"After exchanging greetings my first request was to take a picture of him. He agreed without enthusiasm and pulled on a combat shirt and service cap, and we got down to business.

" 'Tell me, please, what is the class composition of those taking part in your revolution?' I began, pulling out a pen and notebook.

" 'The revolution was carried out by peasants for the most part,' Che began in a low voice. 'I think that among the rebels sixty per cent were peasants, ten per cent workers and ten per cent members of the bourgeoisie. Of course, the workers were of immense help to us with their strike movement. But still the basic thrust of the revolution came from the peasantry.'

"Che's eyes were large, ink-black and very melancholy. His long hair tumbling over his shoulders added a poetic cast to his features. Guevara was very calm, spoke without hurry and with long pauses, as if choosing his words carefully."

On January 5, President *pro tempore* Urrutia arrived in Havana. It was only after some difficulty that he managed to take up residence in the Presidential Palace occupied by supporters of

the Student Directorate. Urrutia announced the appointment of a cabinet of ministers to be headed by Premier José Miró Cardona. The majority of portfolios went to representatives of the bourgeoisie who had no interest in revolutionary change. But at least they were not Batista's men. Actual power throughout the country was gradually transferred to members of the Rebel Army, as active participants in the revolutionary movements took over the posts of governor in the provinces. Fidel Castro and other leaders of the Rebel Army did not enter the government. Che received what at first glance would seem a modest position: head, or more precisely, commander, of the military section of La Cabaña. Camilo became commander of the rebel ground forces.

A sort of diarchy thus took form in the country: on the one hand a bourgeois government having no real power, and on the other, the Rebel Army and affiliated July 26 Movement, which gradually increased their control over the various levers of government. Representatives of the big bourgeoisie began to cluster around President Urrutia and Prime Minister Miró Cardona, and antiimperialist forces around the leaders of the Rebel Army. The polarisation of forces pointed directly at a clash between these two camps, but the outcome was as of yet unclear.

On January 8, Fidel Castro arrived in Havana. The entire population of the capital took to the streets to welcome the rebel leader. That same day Fidel gave a speech to the population and the crowds overflowed the square in the Columbia fortress. He appealed for unity among revolutionaries. Fidel mentioned Che in his speech, calling him a "genuine hero" of the revolutionary struggle against Batista.

On January 9, Che's mother Celia flew in from Buenos Aires. Che met her at the airport, accompanied her to La Cabaña, and showed her about the city. Celia now saw her son as a strong, matured and self-confident man, the true warrior which she had always wanted her first-born to be.

She asked about his asthma but Che laughed off the question, assuring her that the Cuban climate and cigars had a "fatal" effect on the disease.

Che introduced Celia to Aleida March. He asked:

"Do you like her?"

"Very much. She's so young, attractive and brave!"

"We're going to marry soon."

"But what about Hilda and Hildita?"

"I've told her, she accepted the news and said she understood, and agreed to leave us Hildita."

The revolution had triumphed but the struggle for the implementation of revolutionary ideals just began. Fidel Castro and those around him learned well Lenin's proposition that the first and most immediate task of each genuinely progressive revolution is to destroy the bourgeois apparatus of state. In Cuba the core of this apparatus was the praetorian army, the police and the abundant secret services. The people hated them and welcomed the decision to disarm, then dissolve these organisations. Batista's army went out of existence, and Fidel simply dismissed for incompetence the American military mission which had for long years trained this army.

"Get out of here, all of you," Fidel told the members of the mission. "We have no need of your services. After all, we managed to rout the men you were supposed to train. You failed as military advisers."

Now it remained to hand out exemplary punishments to Batista's thugs, whose hands were drenched in the blood of Cuban patriots. During the seven years of Batista's reign approximately 20 thousand Cubans had been killed or tortured to death. These men had to answer for their crimes: the people had demanded that they be punished and the rebels had made repeated promises that the criminals would not get away scot free. Revolutionary tribunals were set up to try them, with all canons of justice strictly observed. The accused were granted the right to employ the most competent lawyers, summon as witness whom-ever they chose, and argue their case before the tribunal. The proceedings were public and covered by press and television. It is striking that the cases against the accused were so irrefutable that almost all pleaded guilty of the charges brought against them. In the most odious cases the revolutionary tribunal handed down the death penalty.

The overwhelming majority of Batista's thugs were agents of American intelligence organisations. The sentences handed down against them aroused cries of indignation in the United States. Reactionary American press began to accuse the Cuban rebels of excessive cruelty, bloodthirstiness and inhumanity.

In Cuba itself where freedom of press was introduced after the overthrow of Batista, opponents of the revolution also appealed in the name of humanism and Christian charity for "an end to the

bloodletting” and for the sparing of the lives of those who had tortured, persecuted and killed Cuban patriots. Since the criminals were incarcerated in La Cabaña where the revolutionary tribunals were meeting, the reactionary press and its American patrons turned their guns against the commander of the fortress, Ernesto Che Guevara. To these retrograde forces Che—this Argentine, a defender of the Guatemalan revolution, participant in the insurrectionary struggle in the Sierra Maestra, liberator of Santa Clara—was naught else but the “hand of Moscow”, an agent sent to Cuba to turn the island into “a colony of Red imperialism”.

The campaign against Che met with a backlash effect. Che’s popularity and authority grew steadily among the people as did that of the other revolutionary leaders. The working people supported with genuine enthusiasm the actions of Fidel and his companions. Speeches by the revolutionary leaders drew huge crowds. Che also gave speeches to most different audiences. One of his first public addresses in Havana was a speech given to the Collegium of Physicians on January 16.

Doctors regarded him as their colleague, and during his first few months in Havana he himself signed his name with the title of doctor, adding “Che” in parentheses. But soon he changed his signature, replacing the “doctor” with “major” and dropping the parentheses around “Che”. For, to be sure, what kind of doctor was he now, when all his time was taken up with political and military “practice”. As far as medicine was concerned, his interest was now purely social: namely to ensure that it served the people rather than the exploiting classes. This was a cardinal point of his speech to the doctors of Havana.

In the same address Che, as if in response to the attacks by the reactionaries, explained his participation in the insurrectionary movement by his dedication to the ideals of José Martí, that apostle of Cuban independence who had spoken out for a close alliance of all Latin American peoples in the struggle for freedom. “No matter where I’ve been in Latin America,” he said, “I never considered myself a foreigner. In Guatemala I thought of myself as a Guatemalan, in Mexico—a Mexican, in Peru—a Peruvian, and now, in Cuba—a Cuban. But here and everywhere I go I am also an Argentine, for I cannot forget my *mate* and *asado*,<sup>1</sup> that’s me.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Asado* is meat grilled over coals, an Argentine national dish.

It was as if this Argentine were the delegated representative of the entirety of Latin America in the Cuban Revolution. His presence on the Isle of Freedom, as Fidel Castro's homeland came to be called with increasing frequency, symbolised the Latin American nature of the Cuban Revolution and underscored that this revolution was a turning point in the history of Latin America as well as of Cuba.

Che was one of the first to point to the continental significance of the Cuban Revolution, which had demonstrated that a professional palace army could be defeated by a small but dedicated group of revolutionary insurgents if this group enjoyed the support of the people. Cuba confirmed that for a revolution to be victorious in a backward country, the support of peasants, forming the backbone of the population, as well as of workers must be won. Therefore it is most important for a revolutionary to work among the peasants to turn them into a fulcrum of revolution.

Che's speeches alarmed the American monopolists, who still hoped to "civilise" the *barbudos*, acting through conciliatory elements in the Cuban Government. Subsequent events were to show that these hopes were ill-fated.

On February 9, in response to demands by the leaders of the Rebel Army the government issued a law granting Ernesto Guevara Cuban citizenship and the rights of a native-born Cuban in return for his services to the nation.

On February 12, Che spoke over television. He announced that he was deeply touched by the grant of Cuban citizenship, an honour which had only one precedent in the past—that of Máximo Gómez, the Dominican general and leader of the Army of National Liberation during the war of independence. Now, said Che, he saw his fundamental task in working for the implementation of agrarian reform. In Cuba two thousand owners of latifundia held 47 per cent of all the land. Foreign monopolies owned estates running into tens of thousands of hectares. If the authorities did not effect an agrarian reform the peasants themselves would take the land which was rightfully theirs.

A day later the government of Miró Cardona, which had been hampering attempts at social change, turned in its resignation. Fidel Castro took the post of Prime Minister. This represented a major success for the popular forces demanding a stepping up of



the revolutionary processes, and a defeat for those whose slogan was "Not one step forward!"

On February 16, 1959, in accepting the post of Prime Minister Fidel announced that a radical agrarian reform law was forthcoming in the near future.

The forces of revolution pushed forward despite the growing resistance of reactionaries, who hoped that ruling circles in the US would refuse to allow such a "mess" to occur "under their noses".

On February 11, the newspaper *Revolución*, organ of the July 26 Movement, printed an article by Che entitled "What Is a Guerrilla?" Che's intent in this article, written while still in the mountains, was to rehabilitate the word "guerrilla". The point is that in Cuba, as distinct from other Latin American countries, the volunteers who fought with the Spanish troops against the patriots in the war of independence were called "guerrillas", while their opponents were called "rebels". Now the guerrillas were fighters for a national cause; they were the people who fought in the Sierra Maestra and formed the ranks of the Rebel Army. The overthrow of Batista represented the completion of only one of the tasks set by these guerrillas. Another—agrarian reform—remained unsolved and would take the same fortitude, determination and self-sacrifice which the struggle against the Batista dictatorship had demanded. The strength of the guerrillas, underscored Che, rested in their links with and support from the people.

The appearance of Che's article in the press marked the beginning of his literary and political commentary, activity which he took up with his characteristic revolutionary zeal throughout all the subsequent five years which he spent in Cuba.

The numerous writings left by Che vary widely in genre and content. There are works on the theory, strategy and tactics of guerrilla warfare; a book of reminiscences of the guerrilla war waged against Batista (*Episodes from the Revolutionary War*) written in the best realistic tradition of Latin American literature; pamphlets (signed *Francotirador* or "Free Shot") exposing the imperialist policies of the USA and its handmaidens; papers and lectures on Cuban history, foreign policy, economic progress, state system and party organisation; reports on trips abroad; speeches given at sessions in the Ministry of Industry; forewords to a number of books, and letters. To this list should be added the remarkable *Bolivian Diary*. The published works of Che exceed

100 signatures although much that he wrote remains as yet unpublished.

In his writings Che endeavoured to generalise upon the experience of guerrilla warfare in Cuba, using it for the further development of revolution in Latin America.

He gave a brief summation of this experience in an article written specially for the Soviet publication *Cuba: Historical and Ethnographic Essays* (Moscow, 1961):

"Power was achieved through the development of the peasant struggle, by way of organising and arming peasants under the slogans of agrarian reform and other just demands of this class. But unity was maintained with the working class, with whose help final victory was achieved. In other words, the revolution came to the town and the rural area in three basic stages. The first was the establishment of a small guerrilla unit and the second was when this unit, now expanded, sent some of its troops to operate in a specific, but still confined zone. The third stage arrived when these partisan units came together to form a revolutionary army which inflicted defeat on the reactionary army in open battle. The struggle that began when the objective and subjective conditions had not yet fully ripened for the seizure of power, facilitated the demarcation of basic political forces and the emergence of conditions for the seizure of power. The high point of this struggle was the victory of the revolution on January 1, 1959.

Che was fully justified in his statement that the Cuban Revolution was no "accident" but rather a development conforming to the laws of history and initiating the stage of popular anti-imperialist revolutions in Latin America, and that consequently the Cuban Revolution has a continental rather than a local significance. Che was also correct in pointing to the necessity of turning the peasantry into an active revolutionary ally of the working class.

To be sure, revolution can suffer defeat even given the existence of the proper objective and subjective conditions. The reasons may be abundant: a mistake of a strategic or tactical nature (consider Lenin's famous words that the seizure of power had to be carried out on October 25 (O.S.), not one day earlier nor later), foreign intervention (remember the fate of the Hungarian Soviet Republic), a split in the revolutionary ranks, the death of its leaders, etc.

A different scenario is possible, namely when a bold and deci-

sive strike by the revolutionary vanguard paralyses the enemy's will to resist, enthuses the people and facilitates a popular victory. Latin American history also knows the "Peruvian variant": the seizure of power by highly-secretive and comparatively narrow groups of patriots in the military having no contact with the broad masses.

The question of revolutionary directions in Latin America calls for further serious study with the consideration in mind that in many countries of the region the violent seizure of power is more a tradition or the rule than an exception

The question is more complex than it seems at first glance. Predicting the development of the revolution in Latin America immediately after the overthrow of Batista was no easy task. Revolutionaries, even gifted ones, are not clairvoyants, and life is always richer than any, even the most farseeing theory.

But we shall not over-complicate our own task, we are concerned not with writing a political tract but rather life experiences of Ernesto Che Guevara. In his central point he was of course correct, that with the victory of the Cuban rebels socialism entered Latin America and that now this continent became a sphere of people's anti-imperialist revolutions.

Che's writings demonstrate not only his boundless energy but also his wide-ranging interests, his deep knowledge of Marxist literature, the history of Cuba and of other Latin American countries and of international events. Che was no pedant nor was he fond of excessive quotations. He always derived his analysis from concrete reality and endeavoured to search out that which was new and of use to the revolution for which he lived and fought and to which he gave all without reservation. He was a soldier of revolution, which he served and without which he could not imagine his own life. Everything that he wrote, said and did had to be in the cause of revolution.

As a political figure and thinker Che was a new phenomenon in Latin America. The bombast, garrulity, sentimentalism and provincialism characteristic of bourgeois public figures were alien to him. His style was terse and he impressed not so much by hyperbole or metaphor as by logical argument. Che was undoubtedly a talented prose writer, but when the leadership of the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) offered him membership Che declined on the grounds that he was not a "professional writer".

Che believed that a revolutionary Communist, particularly one holding a leadership position, must be modest and disinterested in self-gain. This modesty must be genuine, not just for effect. Che allowed of no compromise in this matter. These very qualities were manifested by him in the most variegated and often unexpected forms.

Early in March 1959 Che reached a point of almost total physical exhaustion. Unremitting asthma attacks and the absence of normal rest periods threatened to undermine his health. Fearing for his life, his comrades-in-arms almost literally forced him to take a medical treatment and rest in a villa in suburban Havana. This villa had belonged before the revolution to one of Batista's bailiffs whose illegally obtained property had now been confiscated. The reactionary press wasted no time in noting that Che had settled into a villa, demonstrating of course that he was not opposed to grabbing the loot left by Batista's camp followers.

Che reacted promptly to these smear tactics. In a letter published in *Revolución* on March 10, 1959, he stated that in connection with an illness which he had contacted working for the revolution rather than in a whorehouse or gambling den, he was now forced to take treatment to restore his health. It was for this reason that the authorities had allotted him the villa, for his modest salary of 125 pesos (dollars) received as an officer in the Rebel Army did not allow him to rent the necessary quarters at his own expense. "This villa belongs to a former satrap of Batista, and it is luxurious. I chose the most modest one, but the very fact that I settled in it could insult the popular feeling. I give my word to the people of Cuba that I shall leave this house as soon as my health has been restored...."

Che accepted no honoraria for his writings published in Cuba. Those which he received from abroad he turned over to the Cuban people or to progressive foreign organisations (thus the sum he received for the publication of the Italian edition of *Guerilla Warfare* he handed over to the Italian Peace Movement).

When Professor Elías Entralgo from the University of Havana once invited Che to speak to his students and added that a payment of a specific sum would accompany the address, Che answered him in a polite but extremely curt letter:

"You and I have radical differences concerning the proper behaviour of a revolutionary leader.... I find it inadmissible that a Party or government figure be offered a monetary remuneration

for any kind of work. As far as I personally am concerned, the most treasured of all payments which I have received is the right to belong to the Cuban people, a right which has no equivalent in pesos or centavos."

Once when rationing cards were introduced in Cuba, Che's subordinates discussed in his presence the quotas allotted to each family. Some of them complained of the scarcity of products distributed by ration cards. Che objected and as proof said that his family experienced no shortages of products.

Someone jested: "Well, you're an official, your quota must be higher."

Che took offence. However on the next day he reported to his colleagues:

"I checked up. As it turns out my family does in fact have a higher quota. But I've ended that little ugliness."

At first sight it might seem that such "egalitarian" ideas were a manifestation of a certain "leftist deviation". In reality they simply reflected the striving by Che and other companions of Fidel Castro to show the people that the motives of their service to the nation stemmed from a consciousness of revolutionary duty rather than from self-interest. In a speech given after the victory over Batista Fidel Castro said that the Cuban people were accustomed to seeing the "revolutionary", as the participants in various coups had called themselves, as an impudent type of overfed muscle-man wielding a ready pistol. He would loaf around the reception rooms of ministers, demanding a variety of favours, privileges and rewards for "his services". Such "revolutionaries" turned into social parasites and aroused the distrust and disdain of the people.

But if these were the rank-and-file "revolutionaries" of the past, what can be said of those who governed the republic after independence was won, types such as General Machado, Sergeant Batista and other "friends of the people". For them power above all signified the opportunity to make a killing, become millionaires and satisfy their base lusts. The revolutionaries of 1959 were the direct opposites of such profiteers. They were not interested in honours, wealth or any other benefits, but only in the right to serve the people selflessly. Both friends and enemies of the revolution followed every step taken by its leaders, trying to figure out through their words and actions whether this was the normal "revolution" or something new and genuine, which they

had dreamed of but not experienced up to that time. What is more, the individual conduct and way of life of revolutionaries was of no less import than the high principles which they proclaimed and defended.

The new revolutionary leaders could not repeat the example of those Catholic priests who preach that the flock follow the word rather than the deed of the shepherd. For the revolutionaries, word and deed had to be inseparable. Their primary strength was derived from a moral superiority over their opponents.

Che was fully aware of this. If his Cuban comrades could not allow the shadow of suspicion of political hypocrisy to fall upon them, this was the more so for Che, a "native Cuban" by presidential decree.

But in addition to all these political arguments in favour of a Spartan way of life there were also Che's personal inclination to simplicity and modesty and his antipathy to all superfluities, luxuries and even elementary comforts. He was truly able to restrict his physical needs, limiting himself to the absolutely essential and ascribing no significance to the external trappings of well-being.

This by no means indicates that Che was an ascetic to whom all normal human pleasures were alien.

On June 2, 1959, in the presence of Raúl Castro, his wife guerilla fighter Vilma Espín and a few other close friends, Che was married a second time, to the young partisan Aleida March whom he had first met in a battle in the Escambray. After Che had left on the *Granma*, Hilda had returned to Peru. She had her own interests and friends. Meanwhile, the Sierra Maestra had turned Che into a Cuban and his marriage to Aleida seemed to consecrate and affirm his intention to put down roots in Cuba. Che was an affectionate and devoted husband and considerate father. In their five years together Aleida bore 4 children—two boys and two girls. Hildita, Che's daughter from his first marriage, also lived with them. Che spent the few hours when he was free from work at home with his children.

This hardened revolutionary was a lover of children in general and talked of the children of the working people as Cuba's hope, as the inheritors of the revolution who would continue its immortal cause.

Children loved him as well and wrote him letters from all ends of Cuba. Che answered all this correspondence from the young

with serious, adult to adult, equal to equal letters. In the archives of the Commission to Perpetuate the Memory of Che (under the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee) there are dozens of letters from Cuban schoolchildren addressed to Che as well as copies of his answers. We include only one such answer, addressed to a ten-year-old schoolboy in the village of Aguacate, Havana Province, who had sent to Che a 50-centavo piece by address of the Fund to Consolidate the Cuban Economy. The letter with the coin was returned to the child by the post office, but he again wrote Che, now with a money order of the same amount. This time the letter found its addressee, who on May 19, 1960, wrote in answer to his correspondent:

"Dear Friend:

"Many thanks for your kind letter of March 30, which you sent me in connection with School Postal Day, and many thanks for the money order of 50 centavos which you wish to deposit in the Fund for Consolidation of our economy. I am sending you receipt No. 9186, which bears witness to your patriotic deed.

"I am deeply moved by your desire to continue your studies and advise you to keep it up to be a person of use to your country and to yourself as well. This is the best aid that children can give to the revolutionary government.

"I am sorry that the post office returned your letter with the coin and that you thought that I did not want to answer you. I assure you that your letter gave me great joy.

"Please accept my greetings.

Respectfully,  
Major Ernesto Che Guevara."

\* \* \*

What were Che's thoughts during the first few months after the triumph of the revolution?

He believed, as did Fidel Castro, that the first priority was to struggle for the deepening of the revolution, for the replacement of the old bourgeois apparatus of state with a new one, dedicated to the people's cause; to work for the replacement of the old army with a new revolutionary one, the Rebel Army constituting its core; to work for the implementation of reforms undermining the position of US capital and of local exploiting class, including a radical agrarian reform; to struggle for the establishment of friendly diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with the Soviet Union and other members of the socialist community.

This programme coincided with that advocated by the communists united in the *Partido Socialista Popular*. The leadership core of the Rebel Army and the July 26 Movement were working for the implementation of the programme, at the same time overcoming the anti-communist and anti-socialist prejudices still holding sway over a large segment of the Cuban population.

Recalling the political climate in Cuba at the time, Fidel Castro said in a speech on the Centenary of V. I. Lenin's birth (April 22, 1970):

"It was not so long ago when as a result of long years of specious and slanderous propaganda an anti-Marxist and anti-communist mood was pervasive and unfortunately widespread in our country.

"Would you like an example? Let us recall the first year of the revolution.

"Every once in a while out of curiosity we would ask people, including workers:

'Do you agree with the law on agrarian reform? Do you agree with the law on house rents? Do you support the nationalisation of the banks?'

"We asked questions about each of these laws in order:

'Do you agree that the banks holding the people's money should be in the hands of the state instead of private persons, so that these resources could be employed for the development of the economy in the country's interest instead of spent according to the whim of those individuals who own the banks?'

'Yes,' was the answer.

'Do you believe that the mines should belong to the Cuban people rather than to foreign companies, the big-wigs who live in New York?'

'Yes.'

"So we met with agreement on each of the revolutionary laws and on the programme as a whole. Next we asked:

'Do you support socialism?'

'Oh no, no, no! In no way!'

"It's unbelievable how strong these *a priori* convictions were. So strong that a person could be in agreement with the substance of everything making up socialism, but not agree with the term itself."

In working to bring about revolutionary changes Fidel Castro and his supporters had the heat turned upon them by US impe-



rialists and their local allies, who labelled every reform communist and tried to mobilise the population against the revolution under the dirty flag of anti-communism.

But manoeuvres of reactionaries did not achieve their ends. The reforms by Fidel Castro's government were carried out in the interests of the people and found support among the masses. The working people gradually came to associate the word "communism" with their revolutionary leaders and with the revolutionary changes opening the way to liberation from social oppression.

In order to weaken the revolutionary camp Washington and its agencies made every effort to undermine the unity of revolutionary forces. Of course, they would have nothing against Fidel Castro and his supporters uniting with people in the reformist anti-communist camp, such as President Urrutia, or Prime Minister Miró Cardona or certain *comandantes* like Huberto Matos, who panned themselves off as revolutionaries. But they in every way interfered with unity between Fidel's forces and those of the *Partido Socialista Popular*. They did everything in their means to isolate the Party, block its participation in the government, exclude it from the trade unions and other mass organisations, from the new bodies of state security and from the Rebel Army. The isolation of the Party which fully shared and upheld the policies of the revolutionary government would, according to the designs of reactionary circles, weaken the position of Fidel Castro and his supporters, make them more receptive to advice from Washington, apply a brake to the revolution and finally deprive it of any forward motion whatever. Proceeding from such considerations, the counterrevolutionaries threw themselves into the effort to prevent the establishment of amicable relations between the new Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Such plans also ended in a complete failure. In their bitter resistance to social changes the imperialists gave themselves away as malicious enemies of the Cuban working people. The Cuban people realised from experience that their chief opponent was American imperialism and its allies. It became just as clear to them that communists were the most reliable supporters of national interests and rights, that Cuba's future was socialism, and that the Soviet Union was a genuine friend and ally. Fidel Castro waited for this understanding to sink in before proclaiming a socialist course for the Cuban Revolution and then creating the Communist Party of Cuba.

It is difficult to overstate Che's role in the revolutionary process which led to the consolidation of the first socialist revolution in America.

Let us begin with the fact that Che energetically supported the introduction of all radical changes designed to free Cuba from imperialist influence and undercut the foundations of capitalism on the island.

Che stood firmly for unity of action with the *Partido Socialista Popular* and sharply denounced any manifestation of anti-communism or anti-Sovietism. After the victory of the revolution Che was one of the first Cuban leaders to advocate the establishment of friendly ties with the Soviet Union, and when they were established worked hard to strengthen and develop these ties.

The imperialists, who hated, feared and eventually killed Che, are now trying to distort his image, make of him an anti-Soviet figure. Sometimes he is presented as a Trotskyite, sometimes as a Maoist, or even as a follower of Nechayev.<sup>1</sup> But the facts refute the slander of those whose hands are smeared with his blood.

In 1959, for the first time ever, May 1 was observed in Cuba as an official holiday. The day was crowded with widespread and massive demonstrations of working people in support of the government. In Havana Raúl Castro spoke to the crowds (Fidel was on a tour of Latin America), and in Santiago—Che. In his speech Che called for unity among revolutionary forces, including Communists. Che denounced anti-communism as a tool of reaction and he urged the necessity of carrying out a radical agrarian reform with all due speed.

On May 17, in the village of La Plata (in the Sierra Maestra), where Agrarian Law No. 3 had been promulgated during the time of struggle against Batista, a law on agrarian reform was adopted at an official meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Revolutionary Government, with Che present. According to this law all holdings over 400 hectares were expropriated and turned over to landless and smallholding peasantry. In those cases where it would be economically effective the expropriated land was to be organised into state economic units. The National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) was created to carry out the reform

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<sup>1</sup> Sergei Nechayev (1847-1882)—a Russian revolutionary who advocated terrorism and revolutionary coup by a small group of conspirators.—*Ed.*

and one of Che's colleagues, Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez—was appointed its director.

The Cuban Revolution was clearly different from the traditional palace coup—the rotation of a set cast of puppets.

The agrarian reform aroused the fury of local and American monopoly holders of latifundia (the monopolies held hundreds of thousands of hectares of Cuban land). Washington sent Havana note after note demanding “compensation for losses” and threatening with all types of sanctions. Local reactionary forces openly wielded the threat of counterrevolution. Five ministers connected with bourgeois circles resigned from the government, in protest against its radical drive. President Urrutia soon turned in his resignation too. He was replaced by a stalwart revolutionary and participant in the underground struggle against Batista, Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado. Urrutia and the former ministers lost no time in moving to the United States, where with the support of ruling circles they began to call for the overthrow of Fidel Castro. Díaz Lanz, Commander of the Cuban Air Forces, also fled to the United States and styled himself the military leader of the counterrevolutionaries.

The reactionaries were especially livid about Che. For them he was the chief instigator of their misfortunes, the “evil genius” of the Cuban Revolution which had initially looked so familiar and agreeable! Who was he, this Che, where did this calamity come from? An adventurer without roots or family, an alien, yet he dares “plant” communism on our island, he wants to turn Cuba into a launching pad for “communist aggression” against all of Latin America and even the United States. The reactionary press assured the reader that as soon as Cuba restored diplomatic relations with the USSR Che would be appointed Ambassador to the Soviet Union to “sell out” Cuba even more to the “Reds”.

On April 29 Che appeared on television, whose circuits were controlled by private firms hostile to the revolution. The moderator began to ask Che provocative questions:

“Are you a Communist?”

“If you consider that the things that we are doing in the people's interest represent manifestations of communism, then call us communists. If you are asking whether I am a member of the *Partido Socialista Popular*, the answer is no.”

“Why did you come to Cuba?”

"I wanted to take part in the liberation of even a small piece of enslaved Latin America."

"Do you believe that a dictatorship exists in Russia, and if so, would you go to fight it? Do you consider a communist coup in Cuba feasible and would you resist it? Do you believe that communist ideology is incompatible with Cuban nationality? Have many Communists penetrated into the government?"—the questions flowed from this TV provocateur.

Che replied in a dignified and calm manner. Finally the "nuts and bolts" question came:

"Do you advocate maintaining relations with Soviet Russia?"

"I support the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with all countries in the world barring exception. I see no reason to exclude a country that respects us and hopes for the victory of our ideals."

Near the close of the interview Che casually reported to the viewer that the moderator had been a paid agent of Batista.

This attempt at provocation over television was a clear failure. However the enemies of the revolution did not curtail their activities. Particularly unflagging in his efforts was the American journalist Jules Dubois, already known to the reader, who was also a Colonel in the CIA. On May 23, Che sent a fiery letter to the editor of the journal *Bohemia*, attacking the mudslinging articles pumped out by Dubois, that "jackal, posing as a lamb". Dubois, wrote Che, cast aspersions by order of the American monopolies in whose service he was enlisted. The revolution would carry through the intended programme, whether or not this please Dubois and his higher-ups. If there were attempts at subverting the Cuban revolution from abroad the people would defend the revolution to their last drop of blood.

In order to strengthen the international position of revolutionary Cuba, which ruling circles in the US continued to threaten cruel reprisals, the government decided to despatch Che to establish friendly relations with Third World countries—Egypt, the Sudan, Morocco, India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia. In his journey he would also visit Japan, Yugoslavia and Spain. Up to that time the majority of these countries had had neither economic nor diplomatic relations with Cuba.

This was the first journey through the East for any Cuban or even Latin American public figure. The United States tried to isolate Latin America from the rest of the world and especially

from the socialist countries. During the Cold War years, most of Latin American countries, including Cuba, broke off relations with the Soviet Union at the order of Washington. The latter looked upon the maintenance of any relations with the USSR as a serious crime—"threatening the security of the Western Hemisphere". Recalcitrance met with swift reprisal. The Organisation of American States (OAS), at the time completely under US control, passed threatening resolutions on this score. Everyone remembered the sad fate of the unyielding President Arbenz.

Washington tried to set up a Dollar Curtain separating Latin America from the Asian and African countries recently liberated from colonial oppression. After all, the rapprochement of these countries, with Latin America could strengthen their independence and will to struggle against imperialism and its newest variety—neo-colonialism.

The revolutionary leadership of Cuba decided first to overcome the Dollar Curtain separating the country from Asia and Africa and then to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

The first country Che visited on this tour was Egypt. President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian leadership, and the people of the country warmly welcomed this emissary of revolutionary Cuba. This reception was typical of the other countries as well.

During his visit in Egypt Che met for the first time with Soviet specialists who were giving the country help in various sectors of its economy. There, in Cairo, during a conversation with newsmen Che publicly expressed his support for the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

In Egypt Che met Jânio Quadros, President of Brazil, also on a visit to that country. From that time on he and Quadros were on amicable terms.

The tour of the African and Asian countries opened Che's eyes to a new world, whose existence he of course knew of, but the true nature of which he could judge only now, having seen these countries first-hand. These nations, so different from Latin America in their traditions, culture and customs, had something in common as well: namely that to one degree or another they were all victims of imperialism and colonialism, they strove for an independent existence and development, and many of them were groping for the path to socialism. The leaders of these countries

held sympathetic views *vis à vis* Cuba, were willing to establish friendly relations, promote trade and buy her sugar, tobacco and other exports. Although ties with these countries could not solve all the problems confronting revolutionary Cuba as a result of the economic sanctions and other hostile actions taken by the United States, at least Che saw that the Isle of Freedom had friends in Asia, the Middle East and in Africa. This was no small encouragement. However, revolutionary Cuba's potentially most important ally, the Soviet Union, still remained, at least formally, untouchable—a taboo of sorts.

Che was abroad for nearly three months, from June 12 to September 5. He maintained constant and close contact with Havana and was well informed on the course of events in Cuba. A month after his return to Cuba Che was appointed manager of the industrial sector of INRA while retaining his military post. By that time INRA had become a major governmental institution concerned with planning and working out numerous projects for the country's industrial development as well as with carrying out agrarian reform. It was the former questions that Che was called upon to investigate. However, industrial plans depended upon financing and the country's finances were still in the hands of private banks. The State National Bank was under the thumb of Felipe Pasos, a trusted agent of big capital. As long as enemies of the revolution controlled the country's finances there could be no talk of industrial plans. The development of the class struggle in Cuba permitted this question to be resolved in favour of the revolution.

The implementation of fundamental social changes depriving the American monopolies of the opportunity of further robbing the Cuban people aroused growing indignation in Washington. Fearing that the Cuban example might be followed by other Latin American countries, US ruling circles as early as in the middle of 1959 began to work for the forcible overthrow of Fidel Castro's government through a counterrevolutionary coup. The rightist elements in the July 26 Movement were to serve as the core of the envisaged coup. To disguise their intentions they verbally supported social reforms but opposed communism and the Soviet Union, to whom, they alleged, Fidel Castro had "sold out" the Cuban revolution.

On October 21 the *gusano* (or "worm" as the counterrevolutionaries came to be called) Díaz Lanz effected a bombing raid

on Havana with planes put at his disposal by the CIA. The population of Havana suffered losses in dead and wounded.

On the same day Major Huberto Matos, who had fought in the Sierra Maestra and now commanded the Camagüey military district, demanded that Fidel Castro break with the communists.

These counterrevolutionary sallies provoked the ire of the Cuban people. The Matos revolt was put down and he was condemned by a revolutionary tribunal to 20 years in prison.

By demand of the working people a revolutionary militia was created to struggle with the counter-revolutionaries. Its ranks were swelled with tens of thousands of workers, peasants and students. The plans of the US ruling elite and their local agents to overthrow Castro's government met with failure. The Cuban Revolution continued to advance with unfurled banners.

On November 26, the Council of Ministers at the initiative of Fidel Castro appointed Ernesto Che Guevara to replace Felipe Pasos as Director of the National Bank of Cuba with the delegated powers of Minister of Finance.

Che loved to tell the following anecdote concerning his appointment: "Once Fidel called his comrades together and asked: 'Who of you is an economist?' I raised my hand. Fidel registered his surprise: 'Since when are you an economist?' I answered: 'I thought you asked who of us is a communist.' And so I was appointed Director of the National Bank."

There was a point behind this anecdote.

Che made no attempt to conceal that he was not a specialist on economic questions, but one thing he knew well: the country's finances and the National Bank must serve the people rather than function as an instrument of exploitation in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Che remained Director of the National Bank until February 23, 1961, when he was appointed Minister of Industry. The ministry was newly created on the basis of the industrial department of INRA. Of course, in this instance as well the revolutionary government had as its primary consideration Che's political profile, his passionate advocacy of socialist industrialisation.

In a conversation with a visiting Soviet writer, Boris Polevoi, in the second half of 1961 in Havana, Che said:

"By speciality I'm a physician, but now, because of my duties as a revolutionary, I'm the Minister of Industry. Perhaps this seems strange to you? But on second thought, I don't think you'll

find it strange. After all, Vladimir Lenin was a lawyer by training, and among his ministers there were doctors, lawyers and famous engineers ... isn't that so?

"A revolution disposes of people as it sees fit. If anyone had told me when I was in the unit commanded by Fidel, whose long-standing friendship I treasure, when we embarked on the *Granma* (I was the unit's doctor), that I would be one of the country's economic organisers, I would have laughed at the thought."<sup>1</sup>

A Central Council on Planning was established along with the Ministry of Industry. Che played an active role in the management of that institution as well.

At the same time Che continued to work on the establishment of a new revolutionary army. Throughout those years he directed the Instruction Section of the Ministry of the Armed Forces responsible for the combat and political training of the civil militia as well as of the soldiers and junior officer corps of the Rebel Army. It was in this Section that the Association of Young Rebels (which is now the Union of Young Communists) was established. At Che's initiative this Section began to publish the weekly newssheet of the Rebel Army, *Verde Olivo*, which soon gained a wide audience in Cuba. Che often contributed articles on international events.

Che moved to the upper leadership ranks of the July 26 Movement. When in the second half of 1961 it merged with the *Partido Socialista Popular* and the Revolutionary Student Directorate into the *Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas* (ORI) he was elected a member of the National Leadership, the Secretariat and the Economic Commission of the ORI.

In May 1963 the ORI was transformed into the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC) and Che became a member of its National Leadership and Secretariat.

In the critical days of the revolution when mercenaries invaded Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs) Che was in charge of the army deployed in Pinar del Río Province.

The battle at Playa Girón was still in progress when Che arrived and moved into the thick of the fray. In her book *Fiesta en*

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Polevoi, "Comrade Che" in *Latinskaya Amerika*, 1970, No. 6, p. 80 (in Russian).



Cuba the French journalist A. Francos described her meeting with him during these days:

"Che was surrounded by a crowd of *milicianos* and I could just see his pale face in the thicket of backs. A black beret and a dark green jacket devoid of any insignia.... I recalled the enraptured words of an Argentine girlfriend: 'All Latin American girls are in love with Che. He is very handsome: the pallid romantic face, big black eyes, and a small dishevelled beard! A regular Saint Juste!' In an article Sartre once described Che as a genuine revolutionary hero and cited his words: 'Fidel could find a better mind than mine, but he'd have trouble finding someone more in agreement with his ideas.'"

Francos was present during a conversation between Che and a captured Negro mercenary. "And what are you doing here?" Che asked the prisoner. "Did you come to struggle for 'democracy' as well? Are you taking part in an intervention financed by a country which practices racial segregation? And what's more, in the company of bourgeois youth who don't care a damn that you, a black, don't enjoy equal rights with them. They're taking out their spleen against a revolution affirming the dignity of all races! You took weapon in hand to help these offsprings of so-called good families win back their clubs where no blacks are allowed across the threshold!"

The black remained silent. Che turned to the other prisoners: "Who of you were members of aristocratic clubs?"

A few hands were raised.

"Exactly which clubs?"

The prisoners began to name the Club Nautico, the Miramar, the Yacht Club and others.

Che turned to the Negro.

"And did you have the right to join these clubs?"

"No," came the answer.

"Of course they were afraid that you would pollute the water in their swimming pools. But they don't care about the water in Playa Girón! You have even less justification than they," Che concluded!

"I know, Major," answered the prisoner. "The *miliciano* told me the same thing."

All these years Che lived modestly, worked without respite, studied diligently and took up mathematics and economics, re-reading Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. He shared his knowledge with

his colleagues but never lectured them or flaunted his knowledge. He remained as cordial as ever with his friends and maintained close contacts with workers, peasants, students and with people active in communist and national liberation movements abroad.

Che gave his all to the building of socialism in Cuba and to the defence and consolidation of the Cuban Revolution. But at the same time he dreamed of a larger, continental revolution, of the liberation of all Latin America, including his homeland Argentina, from Yankee imperialism.

And since he, an Argentine, came from far away to fight for the liberation of Cuba, he had all the more justification for leaving the island to join the ranks of those who were raising the banner of revolt in his native pampas or in the crossroads of the Andes.

But the Cuban Revolution was still in its infancy. To be sure, this miraculous child was growing by the hour but many trials and tribulations had to be passed through before Ernesto Che Guevara could exchange his ministerial briefcase for his much-loved guerrilla knapsack....

## **The World of Socialism**

**Without the existence of the Soviet Union a socialist revolution would have been impossible in Cuba.**

**Fidel Castro**

**We're ready to repeat a thousand times that from the moment of our arrival in the USSR we have felt that the Soviet Union is the homeland of socialism in the world.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

From the very first days of the revolution it was clear to Che and his companions that the struggle of the Cuban people for social liberation would provoke repressive measures from the United States which would spare no strength or efforts to repeat the "Guatemala operation" in Cuba.

Of course in the event the Cuban people would fight to the last drop of their blood in defence of their land, but weapons and aid were necessary. In the circumstances as they stood such aid and support could only be extended by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union could offer the Cuban Revolution the weapons so sorely needed for its defence. It could also provide economic aid, buying sugar and selling oil, machines and the necessities of everyday life. Washington and its local hirelings knew and feared this, and it was just for this reason that they tried to prevent contacts between revolutionary Cuba and the Soviet Union, relying primarily on the bugbear of anti-communism.

There was yet another circumstance making necessary the establishment of friendly contacts with the Soviet Union. What was the significance of the social changes which the leaders of the Cuban Revolution were determined to effect—agrarian reform, the nationalisation of large-scale capitalist holdings, free education and health care—in a word, the liberation of the working people from exploitation? Did they not really indicate socialism or a step in that direction? Of course, the reforms could be titled otherwise but we're not concerned with a quarrel over words. Fidel, Raúl and Che knew the classics of Marxism-Leninism too well, they understood that by embarking on the road of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle sooner or later they would arrive at socialism, for there is no other path leading away from poverty, injustice and exploitation.

But if such was the case, then could they really hope to fight imperialism successfully and to build a new society without exploiters and exploited—could they hope for this without establishing the closest relations with the first socialist country in the world, the Soviet Union?

The answer could only be a resounding “no,” the more so that the Soviet Union soon after the triumph of the revolution extended its recognition to the new revolutionary government of Cuba (January 11, 1959). The Soviet press and radio as well as political and other public figures spoke resolutely and unambiguously in support of the revolutionary process in Cuba.

In February 1960 Anastas Mikoyan, the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, arrived in Cuba by invitation of the Cuban Government. This high ranking representative of the USSR was accorded an exceptionally friendly welcome. Mikoyan was met at the airport by Fidel, Che

and other leaders of the revolution. Along with Cuban leaders he attended the opening in Havana of the Exhibition of Soviet Achievements in Science, Technology and Culture.

But the most important part of this visit was negotiations between the Cuban leaders and the Soviet representative that resulted in beneficial agreements, laying the reliable foundation for the development of amicable, fraternal relations between revolutionary Cuba and the USSR.

As director of the National Bank Che participated actively in the negotiations with Mikoyan. They met several times and Che invited his Soviet guest to visit him at home and meet his wife and children.

The outcome of the negotiations was the signing of an agreement by which the Soviet Union was to purchase one million tons of sugar at a price exceeding the world average. The Soviet Union provided Cuba with credits of 100 million dollars over a 12 year period. Both governments signed a political declaration affirming their intention to struggle for peace and the other principles enunciated in the UN Charter.

The enemies of the revolution ("worms") greeted this agreement with howls of indignation. They tried to organise anti-Soviet demonstrations in Havana and created disruptions when the Soviet delegation placed a wreath at the monument to the apostle of Cuban independence, poet José Martí.

However the "worms" were decisively rebuffed. The Cuban working people welcomed the establishment of friendly ties between revolutionary Cuba and the Soviet Union. They understood that the agreements signed would strengthen the hand of the new government and permit it to carry out a programme of profound reforms in the interests of the nation.

The CIA continued to spin plots and commit provocative acts against free Cuba. On March 4, 1960, a bomb exploded on the French steamer *Le Coubre* docked at Havana. The blast resulted in 70 deaths and 100 wounded. Speaking at the burial of the victims, Fidel for the first time ended his speech with the words: "*Patria o Muerte! Venceremos!*" which were to become the motto of the Cuban Revolution.

In the ruthless struggle with the reaction the question of "who would get whom" was being decided: whether revolutionary Cuba would become a genuinely independent country or whether it would again slip under the control of American monopolies. On

March 20, 1960, Che delivered a lecture on this issue on the new television programme "People's University". The lecture was entitled "Political Sovereignty and Economic Independence".

Friends and enemies throughout the country tuned into this speech. Che spoke of the fact that national sovereignty was unthinkable without economic independence and that the agreements with the Soviet Union, which he "had the honour" to take part in negotiating, were directed at strengthening the economic independence, hence the sovereignty of Cuba.

Noting that the Soviet Union had taken on the obligation of purchasing one million tons of sugar annually over a five year period and of selling oil to Cuba at a price undercutting the American oil monopolies by 33 per cent, and also offered her credit on the most favourable terms unparalleled in the history of trade relations, Che commented:

"When Fidel Castro explained that the trade agreement with the Soviet Union will be of great benefit to Cuba, he was simply expressing—or more precisely summarising—the sentiments of the Cuban people. No doubt, there was a general sigh of relief when we realised that it is now possible to conclude trade agreements with all countries, and today the nation should feel still freer, for the trade agreement concluded not only strengthens the country's sovereignty but is also one of the most favourable for Cuba."

On May 8, diplomatic relations were officially resumed between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Washington was extremely shocked by the "irritating behaviour of Cuba". New sanctions were imposed, American firms cut off the flow of oil to Cuba as well as oil refining on the island. But the Soviet Union is a reliable friend. An economic mission led by Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez, director of INRA, was sent to Moscow. The mission concluded important agreements on the delivery of oil and oil products.

Washington was disgraced. The US Government unilaterally abrogated the guaranteed quota on the Cuban sugar imports which virtually closed the traditional American market for the island's leading export crop. But the day had passed when Uncle Sam's wrath could terrify the Latin Americans. The Cuban Government adopted a resolution nationalising the property of the Yankee companies "through compulsory expropriation". In response Washington threatened Cuba with armed intervention.

During these dramatic days the Soviet Government publicly declared that it would extend all manner of support to Cuba in her struggle for freedom and independence.

This declaration was received with immense enthusiasm in Cuba. Fidel Castro expressed his gratitude and satisfaction. On June 10, speaking at a public meeting in front of the Presidential Palace, Che declared: "Let these creatures of the Pentagon and the American monopolies, who have carried out their criminal activities with impunity on Latin American soil now beware. They have something to worry about. Cuba is no longer a remote and isolated island in the ocean defended only by the bare hands of its sons and the noble endeavours of the oppressed throughout the world. The Cuba of today is a glorious island in the middle of the Caribbean Sea under the protection of the rockets of the mightiest power in history!"

"There can be only one answer to the question whether or not the Soviet Union and other socialist countries are our friends—a clear and unambiguous 'yes!'" said Che in a speech on July 28, 1960, to the First Latin American Youth Congress. If, added Che, the Soviet Union had not come to our aid when the United States abrogated the sugar quota and refused to sell us oil, the revolutionary Cuba would have been in a truly bad way.

Che took part in drawing up the first Havana Declaration, published in September 1960 in connection with threats by the United States to bring revolutionary Cuba to her knees. The Havana Declaration reflected the views of the leaders of the revolution and of Cuban society as a whole. Reading it at a mass meeting in Camagüey Che underscored that the Soviet Union was offering aid to Cuba with no political strings attached. The Havana Declaration placed a high estimate on solidarity between the Soviet Union and Cuba. The Fourth Article of the Declaration proclaimed that "the Soviet aid offered in good faith to Cuba in the event of aggression by imperialist armed forces could by no means be regarded as interference but rather as a clear manifestation of solidarity. This aid, forthcoming during the period of imminent aggression by the Pentagon, does honour to the Soviet Government while simultaneously putting to shame the United States Government for its cowardly and criminal aggressive actions against Cuba."

On October 22, 1960, Che led an economic delegation on a tour of the socialist countries. Che was abroad for two months,

almost half of this period he spent in the USSR. He also visited Czechoslovakia, China, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and the German Democratic Republic.

In Moscow Che attended the ceremonies in Red Square marking the forty-third anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. He watched the parade and demonstration from the rostrum on the Lenin Mausoleum.

While in Moscow Che had talks with leaders of the CPSU and the Soviet Government. He visited factories, workshops, research institutions, toured the Kremlin, and Lenin's Memorial Apartment, and travelled to Leningrad and Volgograd.

While in the Soviet Union Che concluded new important economic agreements.

On December 10, 1960, a large audience greeted Che in the Column Hall of the House of Trade Unions in Moscow. Che gave a major speech. He lauded the documents of the 1960 Moscow Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, in which, as he noted, Cuba was mentioned four times and cited as an example for other nations finding themselves in a similar situation. "We were not participants in drawing up this declaration, but we support it with all our heart."

Che gave a brief description of the basic stages of the Cuban Revolution:

"We began our fight in very difficult conditions, when the ideological balance of forces was quite different from the present. We learned and gained experience in the course of struggle; we became revolutionaries in the course of revolution. We became conscious of the truth through our experience, and this truth was that the poor masses of the peasantry must become the core of our Rebel Army. We understood that in Cuban conditions there could be no way other than that of a popular armed uprising against the armed oppression of the puppets of the imperialist Yankees. Taking weapons in hand and joining up with the peasants, we gave battle to the army fielded by the US-allied oligarchy, and we defeated it. We have shown that the people can arm themselves, fight the oppressors and crush them....

"At present we are in the situation when on the one hand our island is under constant threat from the ships, bases and marines of the imperialists; on the other hand, we have the priceless support of the Soviet Union, which serves as a defensive shield protecting our integrity and sovereignty.

"Unfortunately Cuba is one of the hot spots on our planet. We do not share the desire of the imperialists to play with fire. We know the possible consequences of a conflict if it erupts on our shores and we are making every effort to avoid it. But the outcome does not depend on us alone. The strength of the peoples throughout the world who support Cuba and the might of the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union—this is the weapon upon which we rest our faith and which will prevent the US from committing a fatal mistake by attacking us.

"But we must be on our guard, we must vigilantly protect our shores, our sky, our land, be ever ready to strike back.... The Cuban nation, caught up in the enthusiasm of creation, is looking confidently to the future. The people know that they will emerge victorious from all their trials. They are preparing to build a new and better world although, unfortunately, this world must be built while holding a weapon firmly in one's hand. Such is the nation whose representatives you have greeted with enthusiasm, joy and revolutionary inspiration here and in all cities of the Soviet Union and throughout the socialist countries."

Che went on to say: "Cuba accepts the responsibilities accompanying the place allotted her in the struggle against world imperialism and she is ready to stand firm as a militant and living example as long as imperialism rattles its weapons at her.

"But Cuba is prepared to respond to the slightest opportunity for a peaceful settlement of all questions. Cuba wholeheartedly supports the Soviet proposal in the UN for universal disarmament. Let some of the money now spent on weapons be distributed to those nations needing capital for their development. Cuba is a firm advocate of the peaceful coexistence of countries with differing social systems and offers peace to whomever will accept it. But for the time being we shall not put down our rifles and it is with rifle in hand that we shall defend our borders if they are violated by the enemy. And let it be known that counter-revolutionary terror will be met by revolutionary terror, and those who will raise their weapons against us in order to put chains on our island again will be wiped out."

During Che's visit to Moscow the author of this book asked him to write an article for a collection of historical and ethnographical articles on Cuba drawn up jointly with the late corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences A. V. Efi-



mov. Che agreed and soon gave us an article which was published in the book under the title "A Few Comments on the Revolution". This article was mentioned in the previous chapter. We are now concerned with that part of it in which Che takes note of the role of the Soviet Union in helping the Cuban Revolution hold on and develop.

Che wrote that the "victory of the Cuban people demonstrates how the scales are tipping in favour of the socialist system in the correlation of the economic, political and military forces of the two opposing camps—that of peace and of war. Cuba exists as a sovereign state because her people are united around great slogans, her leaders are one with the people and are leading them ably along the path of victory. This is the truth but not the whole truth. Cuba also exists because in the world today there exists an alliance of nations which always take the side of justice and dispose of sufficient force to act accordingly. Enemies wanted to bring Cuba to her knees, depriving her of oil, but Soviet ships carried oil from Soviet ports in sufficient quantities. They wanted to bring Cuba to her knees, turning down her sugar, but the Soviet Union bought it. Finally, they again tried recently to strangle her with an economic blockade but again failed. True, but still not the whole truth. Cuba exists as a sovereign state because the military aggression prepared on US territory is now blocked by the historic warning given by the Soviet Union.

"So the Cuban example served to demonstrate the decisive superiority of the peace forces over the forces of war. Located in the heart of the North American empire Cuba is living testimony to the fact that today the peoples with sufficient determination to carry through the fight for independence will find in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries the necessary support and will be able to defend their independence."

On December 19, Che on behalf of the Cuban Government signed a joint Soviet-Cuban communiqué in which the two countries declared their unity of viewpoint on international issues and on domestic affairs in each of them. The communiqué denounced the aggressive actions of the imperialist circles of the USA against Cuba and other countries fighting for their independence. The Soviet side expressed its agreement to provide Cuba broad economic and technical aid, to strengthen and develop trade relations and specifically to purchase large quantities of Cuban sugar.

Speaking on the same day at a governmental reception in honour of the Cuban economic mission, Che said:

"Leaving this socialist country after my first visit I shall take away two central impressions. The first is the profound satisfaction of a delegate from the Cuban Republic who during the time of his mission in the Soviet Union managed to carry out all the tasks assigned to him, and what is more, carry them out in a congenial and warm exchange with the Soviet people.

"Moreover, we shall take away those impressions prompted by the days spent in a country which has completed the most profound and radical revolution in the world. We felt this all through our stay in the USSR.

"And we saw that 43 years after the victory of the revolution, and many years after the fight against the intervention, this people preserves an unsullied revolutionary spirit. We were also amazed by the profound knowledgeability of all Soviet citizens without exception of the urgent problems facing mankind and by their high level of political instruction. We were given living proof of this since in the streets, in factories, in collective farms we were immediately recognised and people greeted us: 'Long live Cuba!' During these fifteen days we felt afloat on a sea of friendship. For us this was a major lesson and a big boost, because as soon as we leave this country we shall again find ourselves surrounded by an ocean of hostility."

Che repeated his high appraisal of the support given by the Soviet Union to Cuba. "In the two years since the victory of the revolution," he emphasised, "the Soviet people and Soviet Government extended us a helping hand in any and all questions regardless of their complexity. It would take me a lot of time to list all the aid given by the Soviet Union during the preceding two years or to describe all that is contained in the communiqué which we have just signed. But all of it provides clear and visible proof that the Soviet Union is always on the side of peoples struggling for peace and independence, and this in turn will make the Soviet Union an even greater symbol for the countries which like ours are rising up in struggle for liberation. It will mean that the Latin American states, if not their governments then their peoples, will understand clearer that it is here that a truly new life may be found and that the inspiration for a new life stems from here. This is helping them to understand that it is indeed the Soviet Union

and the other countries of the socialist community which will help them in their struggle for independence and freedom and that it is American imperialists which oppress and ruthlessly exploit them.”

Concluding his speech, Che warned the imperialists that in the event of aggression the entire Cuban people would take up arms to defend the freedom which had cost them so dearly. He added that the Cuban people knew that in this struggle they would enjoy the support of the Soviet Union.

Before leaving the Soviet Union Che stated to a representative of Radio Moscow: “We’re ready to repeat a thousand times that from the moment of our arrival in the USSR we have felt that the Soviet Union is the homeland of socialism in the world. We can firmly state that the revolutionary spirit that brought about the October of 1917 continues to live in the Soviet people.”

Che’s visit to socialist countries was extremely successful. At the initiative of the Soviet Union, a “pool” of socialist countries was formed to purchase from Cuba up to 4 million tons of sugar annually, of which 2 million 700 thousand tons were to be bought by the Soviet Union. Moreover, Cuba was promised a wide range of technical and other aid.

Upon his return to Havana Che gave the Cuban people a detailed account of the results of his visit in a speech carried over television and radio on January 6, 1961.

We include only selected portions of his speech, testifying to the immense respect Che felt towards the Soviet people, the Communist Party and the Government of the country.

Che recalled that when Antonio Núñez Jiménez returned from the Soviet Union and conveyed his impressions, certain sceptics labelled him “Alice in Wonderland”. Che observed: “Since I travelled much more extensively than Núñez Jiménez—throughout the entire socialist continent—I might be called ‘Alice in the Continent of Wonders’. One should tell exactly what one sees, however, and not swerve from the truth; and the achievements of the developed socialist countries or of those countries whose processes find parallels in Cuba are truly exceptional. There can be no comparison of the vitality of their ways of development with the capitalist countries. What is most important, the understanding, that their citizens have, of events such as our revolution can have no comparison with that widespread in

the capitalist countries. The socialist countries have a great enthusiasm for us. This was probably most evident in the Soviet Union. Forty-three years have passed since their revolution and today the Soviet people have a highly developed political awareness....”

Che told his listeners about the achievements of the Soviet Union in various spheres of the national economy and made special note of the vast opportunities created by Soviet power for the comprehensive development of the individual.

“I didn’t even believe all this to be possible,” he said. “In addition to other qualities these people are characterised by a remarkable directness, vitality and camaraderie. I don’t say this out of politeness, it is simply the truth, and I said the same thing there—when you arrive in the Soviet Union, you feel that here socialism was born, here is a just system....”

Che gave the details of the communiqué signed in Moscow and drew special attention to the concluding section where both sides declare that they are firm supporters of the principles of peaceful coexistence and will do everything in their power to ensure peace on earth.

Che commented on this section: “For us this question of peace is no idle talk, as someone might think. It is of great importance. At the present moment any false step or any mistake by imperialism could suddenly expand a local war and bring about a world conflagration. Cuba will also suffer the unfortunate consequences of a world war fought with atomic missiles.

“So we must wage a continual fight for peace throughout the world, we must defend peace, but woe to those who fall upon us. We must maintain our self-control while fighting for a secure peace here and throughout the world.”

These declarations were of major ideological and political significance. No one doubted his honesty or political scruples. Consequently his testimony on the Soviet achievements in the building of socialism and his words of solidarity with the international policies of the CPSU and the Soviet Government had a very convincing ring for those working people who, though supporting Fidel Castro’s government, were nevertheless still entangled in the web of anti-communist and anti-Soviet prejudices. In his public appearances Che often returned to the subject of Cuban-Soviet relations. After the mercenaries were crushed at

Playa Girón Che spoke to a meeting in memory of Antonio Guitarras, a fighter against US imperialism, killed at Batista's orders in 1935. In reply to those who asserted that an alliance between revolutionary Cuba and the Soviet Union meant the replacement of American by Soviet influence, Che said: "We respect and admire the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries and the more we come to know of them the more this is so. Not one political figure in the socialist camp has tried to foist his opinions or advice upon us. The Soviet Union, a powerful country with a population of 200 million, founded its relations with Cuba, a small island with a population of 6 million, on the basis of full equality. When the Soviet Union offered us the initial loan of 100 million dollars, they didn't even demand of us the minimal guarantee of restoring diplomatic relations."

Of course, what Che said about the Soviet Union reflected not only his opinion but also that of Fidel Castro and other leaders of the Cuban Revolution. Still, the extremely significant role of Che in encouraging this opinion should not be overlooked.

Che looked upon the Soviet Union with respect and benevolence not simply because as a Communist he regarded it as the first country to end exploitation and the other ills of the capitalist order but also because the policies of the Soviet Government and CPSU, inspired by the Leninist ideas of proletarian internationalism, ensured the security of Cuba and provided her the opportunity of building a new, just society founded on socialist principles. After all, the Soviet Union took upon itself the obligation of providing economic, technical and financial as well as military aid to the Cuban Revolution. Moreover this aid was extended on the most favourable of terms. Soviet aid was based on full and absolutely equal rights and no political obligations or demands incompatible with her sovereignty were imposed.

Che had a clear understanding of this and dreamed of a socialist Cuba with a comprehensively developed and scientifically balanced economy providing for a high standard of living for the working people.

Many admirers of Che in various countries imagine him as a sort of "permanent revolutionary" for whom the highest ideal was that of the guerrilla fighting weapon in hand against imperialism and its minions. Such people are consciously or unconsciously distorting the image of Che, forgetting his role

in the building of the economic foundations for socialism in Cuba.

Che devoted particular attention to the industrial development of Cuba, believing, quite rightly, that the establishment of a home industry would raise the living standards of the Cuban working people, make them more politically conscious and bring them closer to socialism. This is a subject we shall discuss more fully in the following chapter. For the time being it suffices to note that Che carefully studied the experience of building socialism in the Soviet Union. This included planning and management of the national economy and the industrial sector in particular, the role of the Party, trade unions and other mass organisations in the economy and in the development of socialist emulation, the correlation of moral and material incentives, problems of establishing work norms, etc. In brief, he was interested in the entire range of Soviet experience, accumulated over the long years of socialist management.

Che read Soviet literature on these problems, and he also tried to gain the necessary information and knowledge in consultations with Soviet experts—engineers and economists—on visit to Cuba or working there. He sought the same contacts during his sojourn in the Soviet Union where he was the frequent guest of Academician N. Fedorenko, director of the Central Institute of Economics and Mathematics, the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Che eagerly mixed with Soviet citizens—writers, scholars, public figures, artists, and, of course, chess players. One of the first Soviet citizens to visit him in Cuba back in early 1959 was the composer Aram Khachaturyan. Che was on good terms with the first cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. The writer Boris Polevoi, whose book *Story about a Real Man* Che read while still in Mexico and insistently recommended to his companions on the *Granma*, also met with him in Havana. The list could be extended for several pages.

In his reminiscences mentioned earlier in this book, Boris Polevoi recalls Che as follows: “He had a remarkable, strikingly handsome face with strong features. His soft, shaggy, curly beard framed his face, his dark moustache and sable eyebrows served to emphasise the pallid hue of his face which evidently did not take a tan. At first glance his visage was stern, even fanatical, but as soon as he smiled the youth of this minister peeped through. His khaki fatigues, and loose trousers tucked into his lace boots and

his black beret with a star seemed an indispensable adjunct to his overall profile."

Che's meetings with Soviet journalists were frequent. In conversations with them he repeatedly underscored the importance of Soviet aid in the building of socialism in Cuba. In one such conversation, published in *New Times* on July 4, 1962, Che spoke of the selfless aid rendered to Cuba by the socialist countries and of the relations with the Soviet Union. "These relations," he remarked, "will always be rooted in fraternal cooperation and mutual respect for national interests...."

1962 was proclaimed a "year of planning" in Cuba. But the American imperialists were inimical to such peaceful constructive activities in Cuba. Although the invasion by their mercenaries at Playa Girón had suffered a crushing defeat the year before, the imperialists continued to charge the air with hostility against revolutionary Cuba.

The American Government intensified the economic blockade of the island, hoping to strangle the revolution with the bony hand of famine while the CIA continued to train and despatch to Cuba saboteurs and spies with the assignment of disrupting and paralysing the work of the revolutionary authorities. American spy planes flew over Cuba day and night in violation of all international laws. Sizeable forces were concentrated on American military bases in the Caribbean Basin. Such aggressive activities threatened the independent existence of Cuba, and Washington made no attempt to conceal this fact.

American authorities offered "love and the purse" to the Cuban Government on one condition, namely, that it breaks off friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Their offers were firmly rejected by the Cubans. The Cuban Government asked the Soviet Union to help the island increase its defence. The USSR responded affirmatively to the request.

On August 27, 1962, a Cuban delegation headed by Ernesto Che Guevara arrived in Moscow to sign the corresponding agreement. This time Che remained in Moscow only a week. The negotiations were successfully concluded.

In a press statement on the visit of the Cuban delegation to the USSR it was reported that the Cubans exchanged opinions with the Soviet side concerning the threats by the imperialist circles against Cuba. In view of these threats, the Government of the Cuban Republic turned to the Soviet Government with the

request to provide the necessary armaments and technical instructors. The Soviet Government gave serious consideration to the request of the Cuban Government, and an agreement was reached on the question under discussion. As long as the threats from the previously mentioned circles against Cuba continue, the statement said, the Cuban Republic has every justification to adopt the measures necessary to ensure its security and the defence of its sovereignty and independence, and all genuine friends of Cuba have every right to respond to this legitimate request.

The Washington big wigs moved to exacerbate relations with Cuba, declaring the island "quarantined" by a military blockade and began to speak of military intervention and what nearly amounted to world conflict. This was the beginning of the Caribbean crisis. But this time as well the American aggressors, having rattled their weapons, had to retreat before the determination of the Cuban people to defend their independence and before the solidarity of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries with Cuba.

During these hard days just as at the time of invasion at Playa Girón, Che was at his military post as commander of the army in Pinar del Río Province. While there Che suffered an accident: he dropped his pistol, which upon hitting the floor, went off and wounded him. Learning about this the counter-revolutionaries began to spread various "authentic" versions of this accident. They alleged that Che had attempted to commit suicide because of a "disagreement with Fidel Castro".

When the USA suffered another fiasco in the Caribbean crisis, these mudslingers again went to work. Trying to cast aspersions on Che and on Fidel as well they spread rumours that both of them had "broken off" with the Soviet Union. This version was about as "authentic" as the one concerning Che's attempt at suicide.

Of course, the imperialists would have given their eye teeth to stir up conflict in the relations between the Soviet Union and revolutionary Cuba, whose indestructible friendship was a constant source of irritation for them.

The truth of the matter is that the Cuban Government had its own point of view on the means of resolving the Caribbean crisis. Cuba and the Soviet Union discussed this question and arrived at an agreement.



Fidel Castro stated on November 1, 1962: "We had a difference of opinion with the USSR on this question, but there is no fissure in our relations. We trust the fundamental policies of the USSR, and the fact that we are Marxists-Leninists is what is most important here."

There was no talk about any "break" between Che and the Cuban Government on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. Once again it was wishful thinking on the part of the enemy.

Speaking over radio and television on November 9, 1962, Fidel Castro said: "During all these difficult times we had to live through, during all the attacks by the Yankees, and during the economic aggression consisting of the elimination of the sugar quota and the halting of oil deliveries, in the face of all these successive acts of aggression of which we were the victim, the Soviet Union held out a steady hand to us. The Soviet Union was always with us. We are grateful for this and should state so publicly."

The opinion held by the leader of the Cuban revolution was supported by Ernesto Che Guevara in a conversation with American students, published in *Revolución* on August 2, 1963.

Che denounced the provocative actions of the Trotskyites who demanded an invasion of the American base Guantánamo during the crisis. He declared that the Trotskyites had nothing in common with the Cuban revolution, that they were idlers and gossips and that the government had no intention of allowing them to publish their own journal as they were demanding.

In a speech years later, on the occasion of the Centenary of Lenin's birth, Fidel Castro quite clearly expressed the attitude of the Cuban revolutionary leadership towards the "left" extremists:

"Today, as we know, there are arch-revolutionary extreme 'left' theorists, real "supermen", if you want to find a name for them, capable of disposing of imperialism with just two words. Many such arch-revolutionaries who haven't an inkling of what reality is or of the problems and difficulties of revolution are overflowing with a terrible hatred constantly fanned by imperialism. It is as if they can't reconcile themselves with the very existence of the Soviet Union....

“They forget about the unbelievable difficulties experienced by the Soviet Union at the outset of the revolutionary process ... about the terrible problems caused by the blockade, isolation and fascist aggression. Their eyes are closed to facts, and they consider the very existence of the Soviet Union as something nearly criminal. And all of this from a “leftist position”—isn’t this true baseness!”

In 1964 Che was present almost every week at commissioning of factories many of which were built with the help of the Soviet Union. In a speech given on May 3, 1964 at the opening of a machinery and ball-bearing plant (the *Fabrica Aguilar*) Che spoke warmly of the selfless work of the Soviet specialists who had made every effort to put the enterprise into operation as quickly as possible. He observed that the Soviet Union was giving Cuba real aid in its developmental efforts. He also expressed the conviction that Cuba could count on the aid and understanding of the Soviet Government and people in the future as well, whatever the circumstances. “This is genuine proletarian internationalism!” concluded Che.

Che placed great value on the long-term agreement on the purchase of Cuban sugar signed with the Soviet Union in 1964. In an article published in October of the same year in the English journal *International Affairs* Che pointed out both the immense political significance of this agreement and its positive impact on the Cuban economy. The agreement concluded with the Soviet Union, Che wrote, indicates the new type of relationship evident in the socialist community, where an advanced socialist state gives help to a developing one, quite the reverse of what happens in the capitalist world, where the industrialised powers seek to obtain raw material at rock-bottom prices from the under-developed countries.

In November 1964 Che visited the Soviet Union for the third time, on this occasion for two weeks. He participated in the celebrations of the 47th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, and met with Party and government leaders of the Soviet Union.

On November 11, Che attended a gathering at the International Friendship House inaugurating the Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society. After a speech by Yuri Gagarin, the cosmonaut elected President of the Society, and greetings by Gerardo Mazola, then leader of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Nations

(ICAP), it was Che's turn to speak. This address was Che's last in the Soviet Union. We include it here in full.

*"Dorogie tovarishchi!*

"Now I shall speak in Spanish. You know that when the leaders of the Cuban revolution talk into the microphone, it is hard to tear them away from it.

"In my case you have nothing to fear. Comrade Mazola aptly expressed the sentiment of our people. And the other comrades have already provided us with the most thorough information, including even a report on the early fulfilment of plan targets in honour of the anniversary of the October Revolution.

"That, of course, is taking place here in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, I cannot bring you news of a similar sort. In the future we shall also overfulfil our plans in honour of November 7,<sup>1</sup> since this date belongs to all.

"Comrades! The Cuban people began to build socialism only recently. We still have much to learn. We must develop our consciousness and our love for work. But our people are familiar with history, the true history. They know the power of example and they know that the blood shed by Soviet soldiers in defence of freedom, socialism and communism—this blood could form rivers. They also know that the Soviet people shed their blood in places far from their homeland, that there are Soviet military specialists on our island fulfilling their proletarian internationalist duty. They also know that at the present time a large number of Soviet specialists are teaching us peacetime crafts. They know that Soviet specialists are to be found throughout the world working to help the developing nations master the most modern technology offering the key to a better future. They know of the marvelous exploits in conquering outer space begun by the Soviet Union.

"Our people, having studied history and knowing the power of example, will always acknowledge the sacrifices borne by the Soviet people, and we shall be able to follow your bright example, unflinchingly defending our revolution and building socialism.

"Cuba, my Soviet comrades, will never retreat!

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<sup>1</sup> November 7, 1917—the day of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia (October 25 by the old Russian calendar).—*Ed.*

"Our friendship shall be eternal!

*"Slava Sovetskoyu Soyuzu!"* (In Russian: "Long Live the Soviet Union!")

On the eve of his departure from the Soviet Union Che told an APN correspondent:

"I had the honour of representing Cuba at the November 7 celebrations twice: in 1960 and today. When in 1960 we stood on the rostrum of the Lenin Mausoleum we were representatives of a country which was still hoping to become something, which was in the midst of a struggle with the USA.

"This year we mounted the rostrum of the Mausoleum as representatives of a socialist country, a new socialist country born on the American continent. We were pleased to see the name of our country among those of the other socialist states, to hear our military marches at the parade, just as recently in Havana it was a pleasure to greet the new Soviet tanker bearing the name of our capital. This tanker is one of a line of large craft bearing the names of the capitals of the socialist countries. For us such things are a source of excitement, for it was only recently that we took up the building of socialism.

"On Red Square we felt the warm friendship and undying enthusiasm of the Soviet people.

"We visited a number of Soviet enterprises. We saw much that reflects the advanced industrial potential of the USSR. At the Likhachev Auto Works, for instance, we saw new automated shops and new models of trucks."

Che was asked of the prospects for the industrial development of Cuba and for the further strengthening of Soviet-Cuban economic cooperation. He answered:

"Our cooperation with the Soviet Union is making successful progress in a number of areas, above all in power engineering where the Soviet Union has a wealth of experience. The majority of our power stations are now being built with Soviet help. We shall install our traditional thermo-electric power stations, operating on oil and using, when economically feasible, peat and other types of fuel.

"At present, metallurgy has become an important industrial branch of the Cuban economy. We shall build new steel-smelting enterprises. We shall develop the non-ferrous metal industries. We have large reserves of laterite ores in the north of Oriente Province. In that spot a metallurgical combine shall

be built which will serve as the cornerstone of the non-ferrous metal industry. Here again we are counting on Soviet help.

"Relying on Soviet experience we are also planning to improve the production of agricultural machinery.

"Cuba is also interested in the development of chemistry, automation, electronics. But these are all novelties for us at present, and for the time being we must first accumulate the necessary experience.

"Our Soviet comrades are already giving us concrete aid in the chemical industry: next year they will begin the building of a fertiliser factory in the city of Nuevitas."

Che welcomed the creation of the Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society and said that it would facilitate the strengthening of ties, cultural exchange and other contacts between the two countries.

"When the Society was organised," Che said, "we were most excited by the climate of warmth generated by the Soviet people, by the large number of individuals and organisations wishing to join and by the enthusiasm with which the news about the establishment of the Society was greeted. By the way, we are also preparing to organise such a society in Cuba, but you have moved more quickly than we.

"Despite the fact that our friendship is of recent origin, we are bound by very strong, unbreakable ties. Whenever we step on the soil of the country where socialism was first built we feel the warmth of friendship. On our part we can repeat again and again that the feeling is reciprocated by the Cuban people. When we see the major achievements of the Soviet people—the champion of peace throughout the world and ally of Cuba, we feel a rush of strength and confidence.

"We know that the Soviet people have the wherewithal to defend the peace, we saw the evidence at the November 7 parade."

There was no contradiction in the fact that in his last interview with a Soviet journalist Che spoke of peaceful constructive work and of peace itself. After all, with all that he had done before this and all that he was to do in the future, his entire life was dedicated to creating from the ruins of capitalist despotism a just, socialist society, and to the triumph of communist ideals throughout the world, including his own Latin America.

## A Shock Worker for Communism

**The building of socialism depends on the results of labour, on growing production and labour productivity. It would be fruitless to develop our consciousness if we could not expand our production, if we had no consumer goods.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

Events have shown that socialism does not emerge according to some pre-established formula or with cadres already trained for the tasks at hand. It is only after the seizure of power and in the process of class struggle that the contours of the future society begin to take shape and its builders first emerge.

Before the revolution few people in Cuba even dreamed of socialism, moreover, even after the victory of the revolution the idea of building a socialist society seemed quite remote to many. The revolution, however, took huge strides forward, outstripping the boldest hopes of its most fervent supporters. When in 1961 all means of production were in the hands of the state, the most burning question on the agenda was that of utilising these resources to build a new society.

Matters were complicated by the fact that because of the peculiar circumstances of the revolution in Cuba, its advance guard—the revolutionary groupings standing at the helm of the revolutionary process, initially lacked a programme for the building of socialism. This programme actually evolved in the midst of events and under the sway of the leading revolutionary figures. Of course, the most weighty voice in this as in all questions was that of Fidel Castro. Indisputably second in influence on the formation of economic policies was Ernesto Che Guevara, who held key posts in the country's economy first as president of the National Bank and then as Minister of Industry.

Through the implementation of fundamental social reforms the leaders of the revolution, headed by Fidel, endeavoured to liberate their homeland from the oppression of foreign capital, to root out capitalist exploitation and extirpate the corruption, greed and lax morality typical of the ruling circles. They wanted to give the

Cuban people education and to foster patriotism, self-confidence and a feeling of solidarity with oppressed peoples throughout the world. Finally, they wanted to raise the living standards of the working people.

Not merely the revolution's leaders, but broad segments of the population—the workers and peasants—desired such changes and when Fidel Castro announced in April 1961, on the eve of the Bay of Pigs invasion, that the revolution was to move towards socialism, this course found mass support among the working people of Cuba.

But socialism as an ideal is one matter, it was quite another matter to provide a blueprint for it in Cuba, the first Latin American country with a number of distinctive features. After all, socialism was to be built in a country whose well-to-do segments of the population had had broad access to the latest achievements in the sphere of consumer goods—new automobiles, televisions and refrigerators—and yet did not have its own engineers, technicians, chemists, or metallurgists, nor its own industry. Pre-revolutionary Cuba was simply a supplier of raw materials for her rich neighbour. Cuban raw products such as sugar, tobacco, minerals and fruit were exported to the USA which reciprocated with finished products. The well-off Cuban wore American suits, shoes, hats, shirts and ties, ate American canned food, drank American soft drinks and liquor, slept on an American mattress, watched American programmes on American-made televisions, travelled about in American automobiles. Cuban fields were ploughed by American tractors which, along with pleasure vehicles, were refueled with American gasoline; even the books Cubans read were primarily American in authorship.

This posed the question: if all that was American were taken away, if the USA stopped buying sugar and selling Cuba oil, consumer and other goods, could the Cuban keep going, could he fill the resulting vacuum with the necessary goods? The problem was further complicated by the fact that not only a handful of privileged exploiters as had been during the previous regime, but the entire population had to be provided for; that it was necessary to build houses, schools, hospitals, children's day-care centres and to perform a thousand other major and minor tasks without which it would be impossible to turn Cuba into a beautiful garden and Cubans into literate, highly cultured and well-provided-for citizens of socialist society.

Che was confident that all of this was feasible, given the condition that revolutionary Cuba moved towards a planned economy, industrialisation and a multi-crop agriculture, with the active participation in the building of a new society by the working people themselves. Their energy, selflessness and self-sacrifice, in Che's opinion, could bring about miracles, as the history of the Soviet Union had demonstrated.

Che was sure that this difficult task was within the capability of the Cuban people who had accomplished a heroic liberation revolution and consequently gained a powerful ally and friend in the Soviet Union. He was ready to struggle again, but this time with textbooks of political economy rather than weapons in hand.

It could be said that Che began to prepare for the task of building a new society from the very first days after the triumph of the revolution. Soon after the establishment of the Department of Industrialisation in INRA Che ordered the formation of a subdivision for the study of natural resources and planning the development of the basic Cuban industries. This subdivision had specific sections—for electric energy and fuel, metallurgy and engineering, sugar production and related industries, chemical industry, mineral resources, and the agricultural produce industries.

Preliminary estimates indicated that Cuba could very successfully promote her economy on socialist foundations. Che, however, understood that the task would not be easy, if only because of a dearth of qualified specialists, and the conditions would be aggravated by constant sabotage and subversion on the part of US ruling circles. They would spare no means or effort to undermine the Cuban "experiment" and show that socialism "didn't work" in Cuba and so was not suited for American soil.

At first glance it might seem puzzling that this fervent advocate of agrarian reform, who had underscored the tremendous reserves of revolutionary potential among the peasantry, was now in charge of the Ministry of Industry rather than of INRA which had control over the agrarian transformation of Cuba. But there was nothing contradictory in this. The struggle against imperialist oppression in which the peasantry as the most numerous and most downtrodden class had to take an active part—was one matter. It was quite another matter to build a new society, the foundation of which could only be industrial development, for agriculture alone could not ensure the high living standard for the



working masses without which socialism is inconceivable. Che's numerous utterances on this subject indicate that this was precisely his train of thought. In a study entitled "The Tasks of Industrialisation", written in 1961 and published posthumously, Che wrote that a *sine qua non* of the liberation of Cuba from imperialist oppression was the maximum feasible expansion of industrial production, including the production of consumer goods—foodstuffs, clothing, etc., as well as the output of the raw materials necessary for these industries. Che never swerved from this view. In a speech of May 1964 he emphasised that "socialism is being built by the production of ever growing numbers of necessities which are constantly improving in quality. Socialism is not an abstract notion, it is directly linked with the well-being of the people".

Che had a fully clear and specific idea of the tasks of socialist construction in Cuba. He correctly considered that it was necessary to deprive the exploiters of their levers of power—the means of production—before introducing socialism. He played a direct role in handling this question as well. As president of the National Bank of Cuba he implemented the nationalisation of all banks and the transfer of all money deposits to the state. So, as a result of the concentration in the hands of the state of all currency and financial funds and transactions the revolution began to exert control over the activities of industrial and trade enterprises. Soon all foreign trade transactions were to come under state control through the creation, on Che's initiative, of a Foreign Trade Bank.

Simultaneously with these measures and the agrarian reform, that undermined the power of the local and foreign monopoly holders of vast latifundia, the state began to take over enterprises which had been iniquitously appropriated by Batista's satraps. Such enterprises fell under the authority of the Industrial Department of INRA, Che's domain. It should be noted that this department had been established with the aim of promoting the industrial processing of agricultural produce. However, its functions expanded as it came to control more and more nationalised enterprises.

On January 2, 1961, the US Government broke off diplomatic and virtually all economic relations with Cuba, having decided upon forcible overthrow of the revolutionary government through subversion and preparations for an invasion of mercenary forces.

The severance of diplomatic relations and the hostile actions of the USA led to the expropriation of all property held by American monopolies on the island. In February of the same year the Industrial Department of INRA was transformed into the Ministry of Industry with the parallel creation of a Central Planning Council. In April the notorious Bay of Pigs (Playa Giron) invasion took place—just after Fidel Castro proclaimed the socialist orientation of the Cuban Revolution. The defeat of the hirelings was followed by the nationalisation of all major private industrial and trade undertakings. By the close of 1962 the process of nationalisation was fundamentally completed.

Che was well aware of the weak points and difficulties of the first years of socialist construction in Cuba. In his opinion one of the most important tasks of this period was the professional, economic and political instruction of the upper and middle levels of the managerial strata. He and his deputies set an example by regularly attending lectures on political economy, planning and other subjects.

Che was the initiator of socialist emulation in Cuba and ascribed major importance to it—both as a source of improved labour productivity and as a means helping the formation of a new man, a new type of working person on Cuba, living for the interests of the community and willing to make any necessary sacrifice for the good of society.

Che ascribed just as much significance to the voluntary labour performed during free time and without compensation by workers and employees. He believed that voluntary labour for the good of society promotes revolutionary consciousness and represents an element of new socialist morality. Che thought it very important that people in high positions participate in voluntary labour, particularly in the cutting of the sugar cane crop. In Cuba under the bourgeoisie high-ranking bureaucrats spent their leisure time in clubs and gambling dens and their range of interest was limited in the main to immoderate drinking, amorous pursuits and sports. Of course the thought of cutting sugar cane like the slave of the nineteenth century never even crossed the minds of these “servants of the people”. Now everything was different. The sugar plantations and refining plants belonged to the people. The revolutionary administrator is truly a servant of the people. His contribution of physical labour to cutting the sugar cane harvest helps to bring together the managerial functionaries and the

agricultural labourers. In Cuba the bureaucrat of the old order was looked upon as a gentleman of almost a higher race. He was at a distant remove from the working people and regarded himself as their benefactor although, as a rule, he robbed and deceived them. Voluntary work ran counter to this colonial tradition. As always Che set a personal example, taking part in harvesting the sugar cane, in unloading ships, in cleaning up factory grounds and in building housing quarters. In August 1964 he was awarded the honorary title of "shock worker of communist labour" for contributing 240 hours of voluntary labour during one quarterly interval. Che's example was matched by his close aides and employees in other ministries and departments.

Che demanded of the leading cadres not only competence, knowledge, responsibility and the ability to listen to the advice of subordinates but also a good measure of self-sacrifice, extreme modesty in life style and complete selflessness. The highest reward for such an employee was to be the awareness of carrying out a revolutionary duty rather than supplementary emoluments, honours, special awards or distinctions, separating one from the rank and file.

How could increments of labour productivity be stimulated? Improvements in management and planning as well as an upgrading of the skills of the workers through the organisation of circles, courses and special schools were all to play a part. Che did not question this, nor did he doubt that material incentives would play an essential role in boosting labour productivity. However, he expressed a preference for moral incentives. Che believed that material incentives promote property instincts and that the working people had to be encouraged to work conscientiously in a conscious effort to improve the general level of well-being rather than out of considerations of individual gain.

By moral incentive Che meant not only diplomas and the titles of advanced worker and shock worker, but also forms of encouragement such as enrolling a worker in courses, after which his qualifications are upgraded, and offering him Party membership, the right to be a Communist. According to the rules of Party enrolment existing in Cuba only those who have systematically overfulfilled production norms, taken part in voluntary labour, improved their level of education and been active as members of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, can be considered for membership in the Party.

The question of material and moral incentives was often debated at conferences in the Ministry of Industry. Once Che, turning to the directors of enterprises, noted that the overwhelming majority of them came from the middle class, but this did not stop them from working selflessly and contributing every ounce of energy. Why should one doubt that the working class could demonstrate the same level of consciousness, he asked his colleagues.

Che gave frequent speeches about the fighters for Cuban independence—José Martí, the poet, and General Antonio Maceo—and appealed to the Cubans to emulate these patriots, who had served the people so wholeheartedly and in the end made the ultimate sacrifice.

If Che had been in a similar position in Argentina he would probably have pointed to his remarkable compatriot José Ingenieros, the philosopher and publicist who welcomed the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia and authored a widely read book entitled *As forças morais* published in Buenos Aires in 1925 and since then enjoying a number of re-editions. Ingenieros regarded moral incentives as the motive force of social progress—an idea quite in sympathy with Che's views.

It should be mentioned to Che's credit that while giving moral incentive preference over material he did write in an article published in February 1964 that this was his "subjective" point of view needing confirmation in practice. And if it were shown, Che continued, that the policy of moral incentives hindered the development of the productive forces then such a policy would have to be abandoned and the familiar methods of material stimulation re-introduced.

The development of socialist industry in Cuba faced every imaginable objective and subjective difficulty: the absence of experience in socialist management among the highly placed personnel in the Ministry of Industry and on the part of many factory and plant directors—their devotion to the revolution was not always combined with professional knowledge; rapid turnover of labour, mistakes in planning and an initial absence of long-range planning or financial discipline; parochialism; interruptions in deliveries of raw materials and installations from abroad; absenteeism; careless and negligent attitudes on the part of some managers.

Che was convinced that all these difficulties could be coped

with, that the Cuban revolutionaries and working people could grasp the science of socialist management, although he understood that the task was perhaps one of the most difficult confronting Cuba after the seizure of power.

At meetings in the Ministry of Industry and at conferences of directors of enterprises he patiently analysed the mistakes and shortcomings of certain managers, pointed out the way to rectify them and through his own personal example taught them the practice of self-criticism.

He explained the importance of proper book-keeping and appealed to them to protect state interest, economise resources and avoid squandering national wealth.

As always he was ruthlessly self-critical and made the harshest demands of himself. He often pointed to his own uneven temperament and inability to focus on what is most important in a given complex of problems calling for prompt solution, and his occasional failure to set up effective methods of verification of the execution of decisions already adopted.

In his criticism of his colleagues he was often curt and straightforward but this seldom caused offence for it was rarely that the justice and appropriateness of his remarks could be questioned. Che always combined criticism with an analysis of the causes of shortcomings, trying to find means to overcome them.

An atmosphere of genuinely revolutionary democracy prevailed at the conferences and meetings over which he presided. All present could object to or take issue with the *Comandante*—Major Che—without fear of incurring his displeasure. Moreover he encouraged such arguments as a means of clarifying issues and his own point of view.

Either he or his deputies and supervisors made periodic rounds of the enterprises to keep up with their work, needs and difficulties and provide help.

By taking part in voluntary work at various undertakings Che made the acquaintance of the working people while on the job, talked with them on a wide range of themes, answered their questions and gained much knowledge for himself.

Che could not tolerate servility and politely refused gifts—even a glass of milk or his favourite beefsteak, unless the same was offered to everyone present.

He devoted much attention to the propagation of economic and technical knowledge and often wrote articles or made public

appearances explaining the urgent economic questions of the day. Two mass circulation journals, the *Nuestra Industria* and *Revista de Tecnología*, were founded at his initiative.

Che took an interest in scientific and technological discoveries and their application in the economy. He dreamed of the adoption of automation, advanced electronic systems and the building of atomic power plants for Cuba. He spread his enthusiasm to those around him, in whose midst there was no room for sceptics or pessimists.

How effective was Che's leadership of Cuba's industries? He held a guiding hand over the socialist transformation of industry for a period of four years. During this period private ownership of the means of production in Cuba was completely liquidated. Exploitation of the working people was halted. The country moved towards a planned economy. Chronic unemployment, the whip held over the working people in pre-revolutionary Cuba, was now eliminated. The level of consciousness of the working people grew. Thousands of workers upgraded their skills, boosted production and joined in socialist emulation. American imperialists hoped for a collapse of the Cuban "experiment" because of inability of the Cuban worker to cope with industrial management without their help. The Cuban workers disappointed their hopes and Cuban socialist industry was transformed from dream to reality despite the dire forecasts of specialists on Cuba from a number of Funds in the USA. Much of the credit for this belongs to the Communist Party of Cuba and to Che in particular, under whose leadership the complex and difficult transition from the rails of capitalist production to those of socialist production was effected.

Che noted in an article (*International Affairs*, October 1964) concerned with the achievements in the development of socialist industry that progress would have been greater if serious mistakes had not been made because of a dearth of experience and knowledge.

One of these mistakes stemmed from the fact that in its attempt to fill the gaps created by the American blockade the Cuban Government purchased abroad a large quantity of machines, in some cases entire factories, and large amounts of currency were expended. The factories did not provide the expected economic results. The absence in Cuba of necessary raw materials to feed some of these plants was not taken into consideration, nor were



Fidel and Che

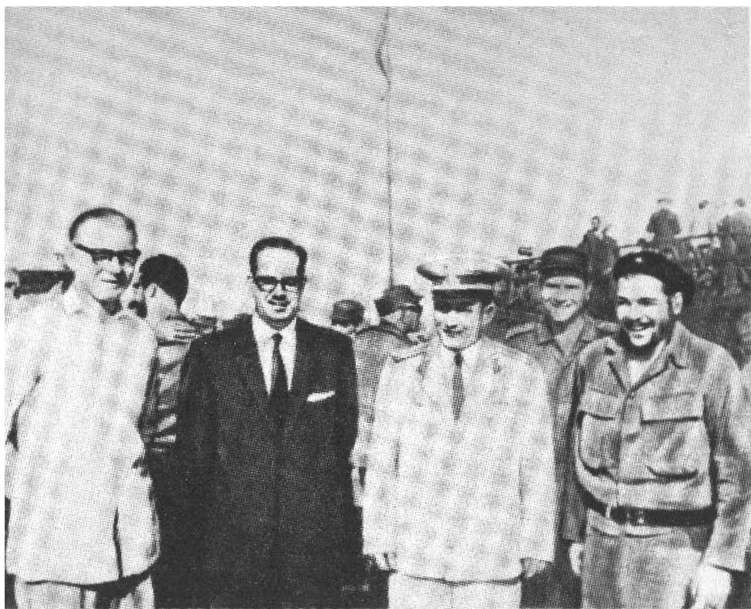


With Soviet children at Revolution Square in Havana



With children





Revolution Square with the cosmonaut Pavel Popovich, President Dorticós and Soviet Ambassador A. I. Alekseyev

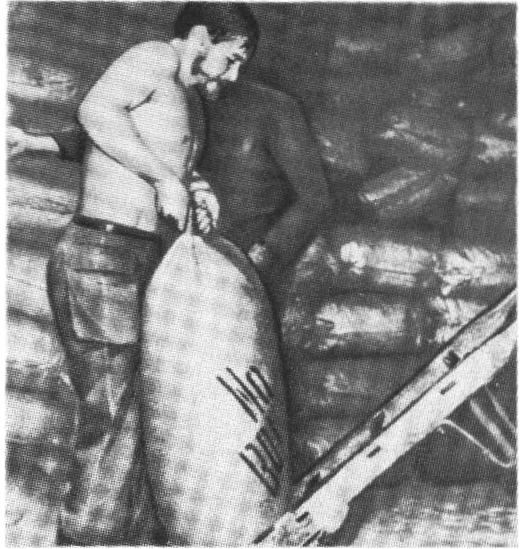


Cutting sugar cane



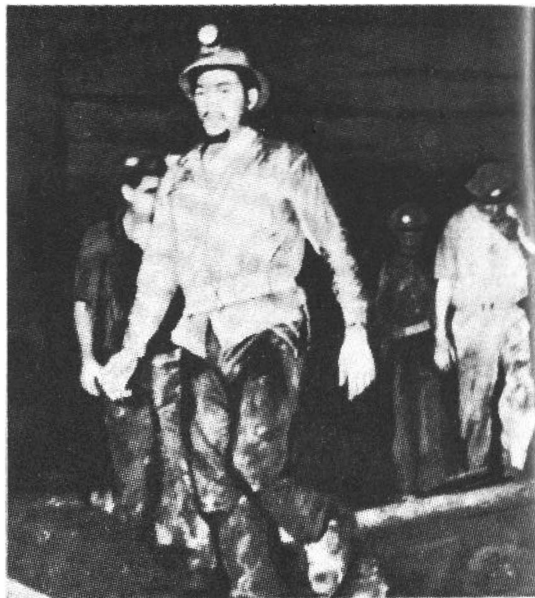
Favourite relaxation

Working as a stevedore



Testing a sugar combine

He also went into the mines



Che with Soviet and Chilean specialists



At the Punta del Este Conference



At the UN General Assembly in New York, late 1964



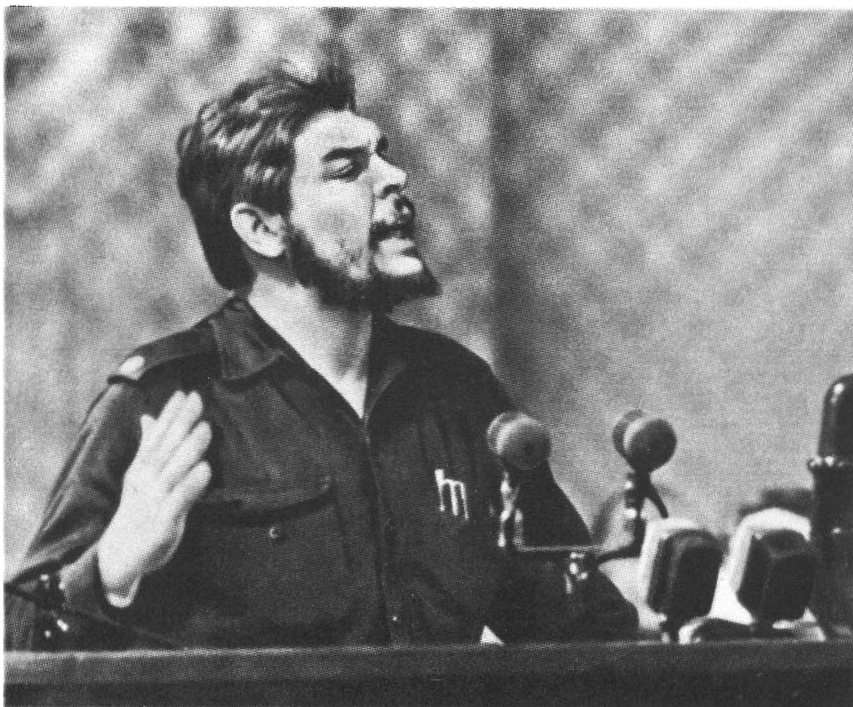
On the rostrum of the Lenin Mausoleum. November 7, 1960



At the Lenin Mausoleum



At a Soviet-Cuban friendship meeting in the House of Trade Unions.  
Moscow, December 10, 1960



Speaking at the House of Trade Unions.



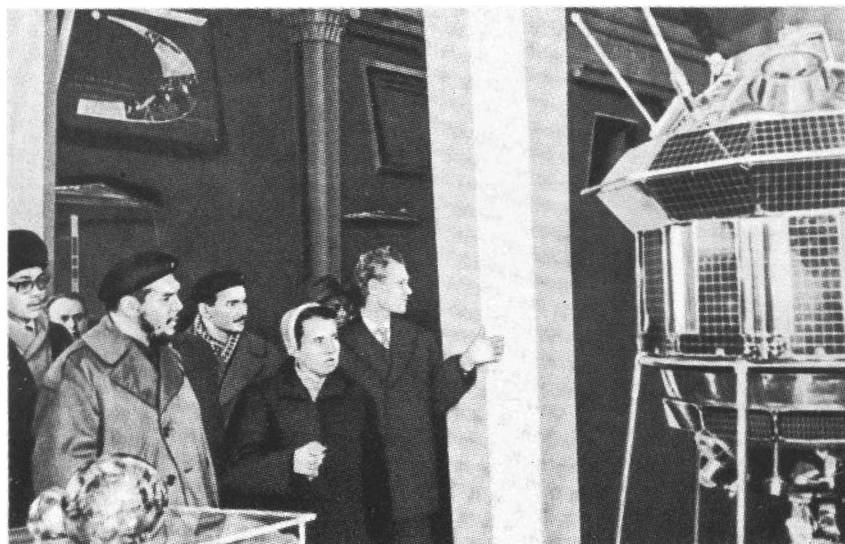


Visiting Lenin's office in the Moscow Kremlin





On Red Square, 1960



At the Economic Exhibition in Moscow



Visiting the cruiser *Aurora* in Leningrad. 1960



Meeting Aram Khachaturyan. December 1960



In the International Friendship House in Moscow. The assembly inaugurating the Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society



With Yuri Gagarin, President of the Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society



Che in 1964



With son Camilito. 1960



Last family photograph. End of 1964

the lack of spare parts and specialists. In a few instances the plant and installations were already obsolete when purchased, making production more expensive and the final product of an inferior quality.

Despite shortcomings and difficulties the level of industrial production in Cuba rose in 1963 by six per cent over the preceding year. This was unquestionable progress.

But Che regarded the emergence of a new man dedicated to revolutionary ideals and acting in accordance with corresponding moral norms as more important than economic progress *per se*. "The profile (of this new man) has not yet taken final form since the formative process is proceeding parallel with the development of new economic relations," wrote Che in March 1965, on the eve of his departure from Cuba, in a letter to the editor of the Uruguayan magazine *Marcha*. "Here we're not concerned with those who because of a faulty upbringing push along the road of egoistic interests; there are also those people who, as society moves forward, take their own individual path and separate themselves from the masses though remaining in sympathy with them. What is important is the fact that with each passing day more and more people become aware of the need of joining up with public interest, and become conscious of their role as a motive force of society."

This is no longer the "gray" mass of people, knowing and seeing no way out of the *cul-de-sac* to which they have been brought by the capitalist economic system. The revolutionary storm which destroyed this system also cleared a path before the eyes of the working people. Now, wrote Che in the same letter, "they are no longer moving in isolation along rarely used paths towards the attainment of their distant goals. They are following the vanguard—the Party, progressive workers and all progressive elements of society marching in close unity. People at the cutting edge of the movement look attentively into the future wondering what benefits it will bring, but their idea of benefits is not that of individual gain. Their reward will be a new society of people with new features, a society of communist man".

The progress of the revolution could have been more marked but for the hostile actions of the American imperialists against the Isle of Freedom.

From the moment of victory of the revolution in January 1959 there had not been a moment's respite from the aggressive acts



launched by the US ruling circles against Cuba. Sabotage, espionage, bomb-throwing, piratical attacks on settlements, terrorist acts, aircraft hijacking, attempts on the lives of Fidel and other leaders of the revolution, the creation of subversive bands, the landing of mercenaries, the economic blockade, the establishment of a cordon sanitaire around Cuba in Latin America—the US ruling circles did everything to crush the revolution, to disrupt the “experiment” and show that socialism wouldn’t “take” to American soil. In this sense Cuba was truly much like Vietnam. Although Cuba did not become the victim of direct aggression (if we exclude the Bay of Pigs invasion), she has had to resist a secret war waged against her without interval ever since the triumph of the revolution.

The doctor turned guerrilla commander preferred work in peacetime. Construction work and the production of essential goods would have engaged his energies in a free society if the existence of the latter had not been threatened by the Washington hawks.

In the existing conditions the Minister of Industry had to divert some of his attention from the plans and projects of his ministry to the questions bearing directly upon the struggle against the insidious probes made by American imperialism....

## **“Cuba Sí, Yanqui No!”**

**We are being prodded into battle and we have no choice but to make preparations and dare to initiate the struggle.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

While President Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers at his side—the one, John Foster, as Secretary of State, and the other, Allan, as head of the CIA—tried to do away with revolutionary Cuba through sabotage, subversion and the invasion which they so feverishly organised in April 1961, their rival John F. Kennedy was of a somewhat different opinion on this score.

Kennedy as distinct from Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers considered that the United States could retard the development of the revolutionary process in Latin America through a reduction



of the mounting social tensions there as well as through the application of force, that is, by capital investment and reform accelerating the development of capitalism in these countries. This was the origin of the idea of dressing up counter-revolution in a red beret, as Rodney Arismendi, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Uruguay, aptly put it. This idea was embodied in the creation of the Alliance for Progress, which, according to American propagandists, was to open a new era in the relations between Washington and Latin America. Fat chance! Here we have the United States, up to that time ruthlessly plundering its southern neighbours, suddenly promising to provide through the Alliance for Progress a sum of \$ 20 billion in annual installments of \$2 billion for development needs. This was an impressive sum even for fabulously rich Uncle Sam! Just a year and a half before at a conference of the American countries in Buenos Aires Fidel Castro had spoken of the necessity of providing these countries no less than \$30 billion for their needs. At the time the figure had seemed fantastic to many. Now the United States was ready to cough up two-thirds of that sum simply to erect a barrier against anti-imperialist revolution. Moreover, the Yankees secretly hoped that the investment of these huge sums would pump up the market in Latin America for US goods and give monopolies new possibilities for lucrative transactions. It is not difficult to imagine how pleased with themselves were the designers of the Alliance for Progress, which was to give them an immense windfall of profit as well as security against social revolution. But reality brought certain corrections to these plans—not entirely in line with the hopes and intentions of the Wall Street magnates.

Having won the elections and moved into the White House, Kennedy on March 13, 1961 summoned the Latin American ambassadors and announced the plans of his government for the establishment of the Alliance for Progress. Kennedy appealed to the governments and peoples of the Western Hemisphere to join with the United States in “a vast effort, unparalleled in magnitude and nobility of purpose, to satisfy the basic needs of the American people for homes, work and land, health and schools”. As one journalist bitinglly commented on President Kennedy’s promises, now the Latin American peoples, receiving all these benefits from the USA, could say: “Thanks, Fidel, for your revolution, without it we wouldn’t have gotten a penny from the United States.”

But while publicly holding out the olive branch to Latin

America, Kennedy continued secret preparations for the invasion of Cuba thought up by Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers. Kennedy believed that the pseudo-revolution promised by the Alliance for Progress could only succeed if accompanied by the demise of the true revolution under Fidel Castro.

The Cuban Government, though entertaining no illusions concerning the imperialist nature of the Kennedy Government, nevertheless hoped that the President would be more circumspect than his predecessor and call off the planned invasion. The Cuban Government had no intention of exacerbating relations with the new administration. It had but one goal: that the USA respect the sovereignty of Cuba and refrain from interference in the island's internal affairs. During the day of Kennedy's inauguration as President a partial demobilisation was effected in Cuba at the order of Fidel. This conciliatory gesture met with no response. President Kennedy, like his predecessor, wanted the overthrow of Fidel Castro and would rest content with no less.

The conscience of the rulers of the United States is burdened with dozens of interventions and coups in Latin America. The efforts were always crowned with success and the instigators always got away with their crimes. Cuba was the only notable and crushing defeat for them. On April 17 American mercenaries invaded at the Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs). The Cubans greeted them with a wall of fire. Three days later the 1,200 surviving attackers surrendered to the Cuban troops. Kennedy's hopes of doing away with Fidel Castro's revolution in one stroke went up in smoke.

Kennedy was forced to dismiss the arch-spy Allan Dulles and although the CIA continued to send saboteurs and subversives to the Isle of Freedom the US President could do nothing else but turn to the creation of the Alliance for Progress. The formal establishment of this institution was to take place at a special session of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council under the Organisation of American States (OAS). The session was set for August at the Uruguayan seaside resort of Punta del Este.

It should be emphasised that even after the invasion of mercenaries the Cuban Government did not seek to exacerbate relations with the United States. To the contrary, it hoped that the painful lesson of the Bay of Pigs would force Kennedy to adopt a more sober outlook on revolutionary Cuba. Maintaining such a policy,

the Cuban Government accepted the invitation to take part in the Punta del Este Conference and appointed Ernesto Che Guevara, Minister of Industry with *de facto* controls over Cuba's economy, to head the delegation.

Che's participation in the conference became a major sensation in Latin America. It was his first appearance on the continent since the victory of the Cuban Revolution and it by no means resembled the return of the prodigal son. Thousands of working people triumphantly greeted Che at the Carrasco Airport near Montevideo. The road from the airport to Punta del Este was lined by throngs of cheering Uruguayans. Che was the only participant in the conference to be accorded such a greeting. The people were welcoming the Cuban Revolution in the person of Che. The arrival of Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon of the USA, a multi-millionaire banker and the head of the American delegation, passed almost unnoticed, just as no one paid special attention to the arrival of the other delegations from the Latin American republics. All attention was fixed on Che, representative of the Cuban Revolution, the victory of which had engendered the Punta del Este Conference.

Che flew to Uruguay dressed in his customary olive-green fatigues as Major in the Rebel Army, and did not change his clothes for the conference. He immediately announced that the Cuban delegation not only had no intention to obstruct the work of the conference, but would cooperate with the other delegations in search of the most auspicious path for economic development and economic independence of the Latin American countries. As proof of the good will of the Cuban delegation he offered for the consideration of the assembled delegates the drafts of 29 resolutions encompassing a wide range of questions facing the conference.

As Che wrote in the article "Cuba and the 'Kennedy Plan' " for the magazine *World Marxist Review*, the majority of the 29 proposals advanced by Cuba could not be rejected out of hand, since they were concerned with facilitating the development of the economies of the Latin American countries. Thus the working committees and commissions were forced hastily to draw up counter-measures to be attached to the Cuban proposals, and to water down the substance of the latter. Nevertheless, the Cuban delegation managed to achieve some progress during the conference: it became clear that the delegates were speaking in a lan-

guage quite distinct from that which had previously dominated such undertakings.

Che noted that three delegations to the conference—the Brazilian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian—were favourably disposed to Cuba. Che particularly commended the position of Bolivia, whose president was still Víctor Paz Estenssoro. Bolivia, wrote Che in the article above, “located almost in the centre of the continent, is a bourgeois-democratic country much damaged by the capitalist monopolies of the neighbouring countries and almost strangled by our common oppressor—North American imperialism. The bulk of her population is made up of miners and peasants, who bear a heavy burden of exploitation.”

Che evaluated the activities of the Bolivian delegation to the Punta del Este Conference as follows: “If we exclude the plan offered by the Cuban delegation, it was Bolivia which offered the most concrete economic plan and generally took the most positive position at the conference. In that high-specific language of hypocrisy employed at such sessions, the Bolivian representatives were called ‘Cuba’s cousins’.”

It is possible that the contact between the Cuban and Bolivian delegations at the Punta del Este Conference had some influence on Che’s subsequent choice of Bolivia as the launching pad for guerrilla activities in Latin America.

Che spoke twice at the conference plenary sessions, and each time in a rather moderate tone. Of course, he denounced the aggressive activities of the US ruling circles and their endeavour to use the Alliance for Progress to isolate Cuba, for only those countries following the anti-Cuban example of Washington could count on receiving the American millions.

Che also demonstrated that the Alliance for Progress would only facilitate the development of the less important branches of the national economies of these countries, that the Alliance’s goal was to increase rather than reduce the dependence of Latin America upon American monopolies. At the same time he indicated that Cuba had no wish to prevent the Latin American countries from using even the limited and extremely dubious opportunities for development luring them into participation in the Alliance for Progress.

“With all candour the Cuban delegation announces to you,” said Che in an address to the August 9 plenary session, “that we wish to remain in the family of Latin American republics, to coexist

with you—without forfeiting our own nature. We would like your growth rates to match ours, but we shall not demur if they differ. We only demand assurances of the inviolability of our borders.”

Of course, continued Che, if no social transformations are carried through then the Cuban example will be followed by other countries and Fidel Castro’s prophecy will be realised that “the Andes Cordillera will become the Sierra Maestra of America”.

Che’s speech to the concluding session on August 16 was just as moderate. In the article in *World Marxist Review* referred to above, Che describes his address:

“At the concluding plenary session of the conference the Cuban delegation abstained from voting on all the documents which had been drawn up, and provided an explanation of its position. We said that Cuba could not agree either with ‘money’ politics or with the principle of free enterprise. We were also disturbed that the final documents contained no condemnatory words for those who are responsible for our misfortunes—the imperialist monopolies—nor was there a denunciation of aggression. Moreover, all of our questioning to find out if Cuba could take part in the Alliance for Progress were greeted with stony silence, which we interpreted as a negative answer. It is quite clear why we could not participate in the Alliance which would do nothing for our people.”

Che also pointed out a positive aspect of the final document produced by the conference: one of the sub-points mentions the existence in Latin America, alongside the bourgeois “free enterprise” countries, of those in which “free enterprise” had been abolished.

“The Cuban delegation,” Che wrote in the article, “read out this paragraph and announced that it represented a victory for the idea of peaceful coexistence, expressing the possibility of the coexistence of two different social systems, and indicated that the adoption of this paragraph was one of the positive results of this conference.” However, Che continued, the American delegate later made a biting verbal attack against the thesis and announced non-recognition of the Cuban Government.

Nevertheless the Cuban side considered it possible to probe even further. Che met with one of the members of the American delegation, the 28-year-old Richard N. Goodwin, one of the inner circle of the Kennedy administration. According to Goodwin Che offered to compensate the American property holders for

the value of confiscated property and also to reduce the amount of revolutionary propaganda disseminated to other Latin American countries if the USA would halt hostile attacks against Cuba and call off the economic blockade. Speaking on Havana television after the Punta del Este Conference Che for his part said that he had passed on the following to Goodwin: that Cuba was willing to enter into negotiations with the USA to regulate relations and that Cuba was not looking for a fight with the USA although if necessary she would fight in any and every way. Cuba wishes to remain in the Latin American system and regards herself as linked by cultural traditions with the continent. "We demand," Che told Goodwin, "recognition of our right to belong to Latin America or to the Organisation of American States while retaining our own social and economic system, and the recognition of our absolute right to friendship with any country we choose."

Goodwin made no comment, promising only to communicate Che's message to President Kennedy.

Che's meeting with Goodwin provoked sundry commentary in the Latin American press. Many observers felt that the meeting would open the way to a certain *modus vivendi* between the USA and Cuba. In reality the USA was by no means interested in any sort of rational agreement with Cuba. It was prepared to "forgive" Cuba but only on the condition that she reject Soviet aid and take an anti-Soviet stance, more precisely, get on her knees and beg mercy from the Yankees.

This was the thrust of a conversation between Che and the President of Argentina, Arturo Frondizi. At the beginning of the Punta del Este Conference Che received Frondizi's personal invitation to visit him in Buenos Aires. Frondizi was an extremely contradictory figure in Argentine politics. For many years he took progressive stances but after his election as President he succumbed to pressure from reactionary elements in the army and the American Embassy and instead of carrying out promised reforms began to persecute Communists and facilitate the increased penetration by American monopolies of the Argentine economy. He even cut off diplomatic relations with revolutionary Cuba. Despite this reactionary army circles, apparently, continued to distrust Frondizi and regard him as too "left".

Che left by plane to meet Frondizi on August 18 and stayed in Buenos Aires only a few hours. His meeting with Frondizi was

carried on in camera. When the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs was informed of the rendezvous he resigned his post in protest. The reactionary generals also went into a rage and if Che had remained in Buenos Aires a short while longer he might well have been arrested along with Frondizi himself.

Both Frondizi and Che were aware of the danger, but nevertheless they decided to risk and meet. Frondizi hoped to convince his famous compatriot to take Cuba out of the "Soviet bloc" and return it to the Latin American sheepfold. If Frondizi could manage to swing revolutionary Cuba to the side of the USA, Washington in gratitude would keep him in his presidential office. The game was worth the candles, and Frondizi put up the stakes.

Che accepted Frondizi's proposal for a meeting, but for different reasons. Far from disdaining contacts with Latin American political figures of all stripes Che actually sought them. In Uruguay he was warmly welcomed by President Haedo. Such contacts undermined the American policy of maintaining a cordon sanitaire against revolutionary Cuba. What is more, he was of course anxious to see his homeland once again to find out if it had changed in the ten years since he had left it, travelling through Bolivia to meet Mial in Venezuela.

The meeting did not live up to Frondizi's expectations. Che repeated what he had earlier told Goodwin. Frondizi treated his guest to the famous Argentine shish-kebab—*asado*. Then they drank *mate* and parted. Che stopped to visit his seriously ill aunt Beatriz. By evening of the same day he had already returned to Montevideo.

A day later Che left Uruguay in the direction of Havana. On the way he was to meet with yet another President, an old acquaintance since his journey to Egypt, Jânio Quadros, who was the leader of the largest Latin American country, Brazil. Quadros as distinct from Frondizi displayed a large measure of independence *vis à vis* the USA and made no attempt to conceal his sympathy with revolutionary Cuba. This aroused the ire of the local reactionaries and the dissatisfaction of the ruling elite in Washington. Thumbing his nose at them, Quadros warmly welcomed Che in the new capital city Brasilia and awarded him the Cruzeiro do Sul, the highest order of distinction in Brazil.

What then were the results of the Punta del Este Conference? It demonstrated that even among the ruling circles in the Latin

American countries there were many who refused to cater to Washington, and that revolutionary Cuba enjoyed widespread sympathy and even admiration. It further showed that the United States was bent on continuing to "squeeze" Cuba and creating every imaginable hardship for her.

A short time later the situation in Latin America grew even more complicated, and tilted against the national liberation forces and revolutionary Cuba. Frondizi was overthrown by the military and Quadros turned in his resignation in the face of overwhelming pressure from the right. In early 1962 Cuba was excluded from the Organisation of American States over the objections of Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia and Mexico alone, but soon all of these countries, excepting Mexico, broke off all economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba. All of this was carried out under pressure from Washington, which threatened to deprive all recalcitrants of the immense sums in the Alliance for Progress. At that time no one knew that these promised billions would shrink to miserable handouts and that the Alliance for Progress undertaking would collapse as magnificently as had previous US plans and projects for the reconstruction and development of the Latin American countries.

The Caribbean crisis of 1962 also demonstrated that the United States had no intention of regulating its relations with Cuba on the basis of equal rights and mutual respect, rather it intended to risk world nuclear holocaust if only it could obliterate the Cuban Revolution from the face of the earth. "*Cuba sí, Yanqui no!*" was the response thrown at these parries of the US imperialists, a response voiced by the working people of Cuba as well as by their friends throughout the world.

Che gave a sober assessment of these changes. In an article he wrote: "While it seemed that Kennedy had certain consistent ideas about peaceful coexistence, the political groups now in sway are more sceptical and willing to risk war in the manner of Foster Dulles, if only they can reach their goals. At the given stage the most visible objects of the attempt to restrain socialism are South Vietnam and Cuba. These two spots can be the source of the spark igniting a worldwide conflagration."

On August 18, 1964, US Secretary of State Dean Rusk cynically announced that there was no reason to hope for an improvement in relations between the USA and Cuba, which, he alleged, posed a threat to the Western Hemisphere. The US



Government considered that this threat would be eliminated only with the overthrow of Castro's regime, declared Rusk.

Rusk's declaration confirmed that the US Administration after the assassination of Kennedy had again intensified their struggle against Cuba and decisively rebuffed all attempts at conciliation. Washington's central task in Latin America was now to prevent the emergence of a "second Cuba" at all costs.

Of course, the Cuban leaders could have hoped for divine mercy and, gritting their teeth, patiently turned the other cheek to the unceasing stream of American provocations and subversive acts threatening to overwhelm them. But this would have run against their true grain as fighters who had carried out the first anti-imperialist and genuinely popular revolution on American soil and who were the first in the Western Hemisphere to unfurl the banner of socialism.

No, revolutionary Cuba could not let slip even a hint of weakness. Her hopes rested upon the approaching anti-imperialist revolution in Latin America and her immediate need was to counteract the pressure from the US ruling elite.

But was there a real hope for a continental revolution? There was, for the Cuban Revolution itself was a harbinger of continental revolution.

"The victory in Cuba," wrote Rodney Arismendi soon after Fidel Castro's accession to power, "is of overriding importance for our entire continent, it has brought to a junction and intensified all the contradictions which have impregnated the huge womb of Latin America with the embryo of national liberation revolutions.

"The unity of our revolution is determined by the historical and geographical community of our peoples, which is particularly marked in certain regions. This fact contributes to the existing solidarity between national liberation movements in separate states. The people will never keep their distance from events taking place in another state. Guatemala's experience of 1954 and Cuba's of today bear witness to this. The Cubans are correct in saying that revolution now speaks Spanish."

Now everyone saw that the winds of revolution were blowing through Latin America. In 1965, Tad Szulc, a prominent American regional specialist, published a book under the title *The Winds of Revolution. Latin America Today and Tomorrow*. In it he wrote: "The revolutionary theme—clarion-clear in some parts,

still muted, uncertain, almost unconscious in others—is the dominant motif sounding amid the restless poverty-plagued, dis-oriented, and explosively expanding populations of Latin America in this decisive decade.”

Szulc observed that revolutionary tendencies in Latin America did not as yet pose a threat to the USA equal to that created by events in Cuba. In many cases these tendencies were developing quietly and invisibly, taking on sharply articulated nationalist or neutralist forms or that of opposition to North American economic and political presence and influence. But regardless of individual forms these tendencies were a serious challenge to the US position in Latin America.

Even the clergy talked of social revolution. The Colombian priest Camilo Torres broke with the church, joined a guerrilla unit and was killed giving battle to government troops. “Insurgent” clergy emerged in other Latin American countries as well.

Could revolutionary Cuba remain on the sidelines of the revolutionary process in the Western Hemisphere given the unremitting aggressive actions launched against her by the United States? Of course not! Losing hope in the possibility of a peaceful settlement of problems with the imperious Yankees, Cuba came to the conclusion that only the development of the anti-imperialist movement on the continent could curb the immoderate American gendarme lurking near her shores.

Under the circumstances Che was confronted with a dilemma: on the one hand he was up to his neck in the peacetime effort to build socialism in Cuba, and on the other he was powerfully drawn to the ongoing Latin American revolution. Did he have the right after having traversed the long road from the Argentine pampas to the Sierra Maestra in search of revolution, to remain now on the Isle of Freedom? He quickly resolved the dilemma in his own mind. He could only choose the cutting edge of Latin American revolution, the unbeaten and most dangerous path. Once the decision was made his title as minister became a burden and he became restless to mount his revolutionary Rocinante and move into action again. His back itched to feel the weight of a heavy knapsack stuffed with cartridges, medicine and books and his shoulders chafed to feel the rub of the strap of a tommy-gun. He would close his eyes and see himself huddled next to a campfire, tormented by mosquitos and wheezing from an asthma

attack, but happy in the company of those he loved—the peasants, Indians and Negroes of Latin America.

It was a mutual love. After all, they loved him too for the fact that he treated their children, helped their wives and mothers. They loved him for his courage and tenderness and pitied him, this, as they saw him, frail man constantly wheezing with asthma, and yet so handsome, coming to them to share their sorrows and hopes, to fight alongside them for their happiness and freedom, and if fate so decreed, to die with them on some field overgrown with thickets or on the banks of some nameless mountain stream. At least that was the way things were during the brighter days in the Sierra Maestra....

But before setting off on the Rocinante of his dreams he had to carry out a wide range of missions and tasks assigned by his Government and Party. He was as yet to speak more than once at international forums and denounce the criminal actions of American imperialism, appealing for unity in the struggle against the insatiable empire of dollar. He would call for international solidarity with the heroic people of Vietnam. To his last day in Cuba he would visit factories, workshops and construction sites, calling for organisation, discipline and learning and appealing for participation in socialist emulation and voluntary work. And as always during his free time he would cut sugar cane; in the morning before the dawn broke and before his colleagues and visitors had claimed all of his time, he would read books, write verse or simply dream of a bright future for Latin America, when its children would not die of hunger and its beautiful women prematurely age from crushing work, disease and poverty....

Early in December 1964 Che flew to New York at the head of the Cuban delegation to the 19th General Assembly of the United Nations. This was Che's first visit to the USA after his brief stay in Miami twelve years before. But while his first visit to Yankee-land (as Latin Americans call their northern neighbour) passed unnoticed, now he was the centre of attention in the news media. Now indeed he represented the revolutionary government of Cuba, whose courage had earned the respect and admiration of the entire world.

On December 11 Che made a major speech to the General Assembly. He condemned the US ruling elite for its aggressive activities in various parts of the world. The USA continued to

wage an undeclared war against revolutionary Cuba, Che said from the UN rostrum. The CIA continued to train gangs of mercenaries at a number of secret bases in Central America and the Caribbean Basin. In the first 11 months of 1964 alone, 1,323 acts of subversion and provocation were carried out against Cuba at the instigation of US ruling circles.

"We wish to build socialism," said Che. "We proclaim ourselves supporters of those who struggle for peace, and we declare that we consider ourselves to be among the neutral countries, although we are Marxists-Leninists, because the neutral countries are also fighting imperialism. We want peace and want to build a better life for our people and are therefore making every effort not to fall for Yankee provocations, but we are familiar with the reasoning of their government that attempts to make us pay dearly for peace. We reply that the price shall not exceed our dignity."

Adlai E. Stevenson, giving the US reply, accused Che of "communism" and attempting to explain Cuba's economic difficulties by the American blockade. Che retorted: "I will not take the time to repeat the true history of American economic aggression against Cuba. I shall only note that despite this aggression we are overcoming and shall overcome our difficulties with the fraternal aid of the socialist countries and above all of the Soviet Union. And although the economic blockade does us damage it will not retard our movement forward and no matter what happens we shall cause a little headache to our opponents by speaking at this assembly and at other public forums, by giving things their proper names and above all by identifying the US representatives as the gendarmes trying to subordinate the entire world to their dictatorship."

Che's audience, even those with the richest imaginations and most unrestrained fantasies, could not have pictured the subsequent course of events in his life. This man was still destined to write one of the most tragic pages in the history of the Latin American liberation movement. But at the time Che himself probably had no clear idea of what was in store for him. One thing he did know was that Rocinante was already saddled and waited the return of its master to gallop off again to distant parts, bringing hope to the suffering and downtrodden that poverty and injustice could be swept away....

# **“Bolivian Diary”**

## **A Mysterious Disappearance**

**The first and basic condition of a guerrilla movement is absolute secrecy.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

On March 14, 1965 Ernesto Che Guevara returned to Havana after a long stay abroad. He had been absent from Cuba more than three months. On December 9, 1964 Che flew from Havana to New York where he remained eight days, participating in a session of the UN General Assembly. On December 17 he left the USA and flew to Algeria via Canada and Ireland. Next he travelled to Mali and from there to the Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, Ghana and Dahomey. Then he returned to Algeria and from there went, via Paris, to Tanzania. From Tanzania to Cairo, from there to Algeria and then again to Cairo. From Cairo he returned to Havana where Fidel Castro, Osvaldo Dorticós and other leaders and his wife Aleida March came to meet him at the Rancho Boyeros Airport.

Che's foreign travels, in which he was accompanied by Osmany Cienfuegos then responsible for the international relations of the CPC Central Committee, were widely covered in the Cuban press. Che made a speech at the UN General Assembly, he appeared on US television and had an interview with American journalists. In Algeria he took part in the Second Economic Seminar of the Organisation for Afro-Asian Solidarity, and he met with officials and other public figures as well as journalists in the other African countries.

Obviously, Che's lengthy stay in Africa served a particular political purpose, but what specifically? Che was endeavouring to

establish direct contact with the members of the African national liberation movement with the aim of uniting it with similar movements in Asia and Latin America in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism. Subsequently, these contacts were useful in convening the Tri-Continental Congress in Havana (January 3-6, 1966) and in establishing the Afro-Asian-Latin American Peoples Solidarity Organisation with its quarters in the Cuban capital.

This new and prolonged acquaintance with the African countries could only harden Che's confidence in the efficacy of guerrilla methods in the struggle against imperialism. Algeria was the most vivid proof of this: the guerrilla methods applied by the Algerian freedom fighters in the end forced France to withdraw from the country, just as similar methods had earlier driven France out of Indochina.

The situation looked promising in the former Belgian Congo as well where the supporters of Patrice Lumumba had kept up guerrilla activities after his murder.

The guerrilla struggle was also being carried on in Portugal's African colonies. New leaders were appearing everywhere and declaring war against colonialism. They organised parties, movements, guerrilla units and whole armies. Some of them succeeded in overthrowing the colonial puppets and seizing power, while others suffered defeat. Among the opponents of colonialism the conviction held sway that with money, weapons and a small number of brave men victory could be won, independence gained and a blow struck against imperialism. It seemed that all they had to do was initiate the action by firing at the enemy and the movement would begin to grow like an avalanche burying the colonialists. A genuine wish to fight, a fanatical faith in the coming triumph of the sacred cause, willingness to die for it—how all of this resembled what had happened in Latin America and how familiar it was to this Minister of Industry who was searching for and apparently found in the dense forests of Africa confirmation of his thesis on the magical power of the guerrilla methods of struggle.

Meanwhile, although the flame of guerrilla warfare was not extinguished in Latin America, neither was it making the headway anticipated by its supporters. Guerrilla units were active in Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru. However, it could not be said that they had any major successes to boast of.

Furthermore, their activities served to splinter rather than unite the anti-imperialist groups. Did it follow that the guerrilla experience of the Cuban Revolution was inapplicable in other Latin American countries?

There was no unanimity on this question. Supporters of guerrilla actions "at all costs" believed that the guerrilla units were incorrectly applying this experience and therefore suffering defeat and dissolution. Their opponents pointed to the fact that the guerrilla struggle had not struck a responsive chord among the masses—whether peasant or proletarian—and that the objective conditions had not yet ripened in many countries for successful armed struggle. The polemics grew more caustic and as always in such circumstances there were mutual recriminations, suspicions and accusations of bias, hypocrisy and even perfidy.

What was Che's opinion on the matter? He was more than ever convinced of the efficacy of guerrilla methods. Che believed that the personality and authority of the leader of a given guerrilla movement was an important component of success. In the article "Guerrilla Warfare as a Method" he wrote: "As a rule, a guerrilla war in the interests of the people is led by a figure enjoying broad authority." Cuba had such a figure in Fidel Castro, the gifted political and military leader, whose authority was recognised by both the progressive forces and their opponents. No equal of Fidel had emerged to take charge of the guerrilla movement in Latin America. There were some talented figures who had fallen in battle before fully demonstrating their gifts. But could not Che fill this leadership gap? Was he not a true citizen of Latin America in the spirit of the best traditions of San Martín, Bolívar, Martí and other heroes of the liberation wars waged on this continent?

To be sure this begged a question: would not his direct participation in revolutionary actions on foreign territory be an act of interference in the domestic affairs of another country? From a formal, juridical point of view the answer was yes. But the reactionary regimes themselves, and most prominently the United States, had long practiced interference universally as a means of suppressing the revolutionary anti-imperialist movements. The USA had launched armed expeditions against disobedient Latin American republics as well as applying economic sanctions, plotting and promoting coups and assassinating obstreperous figures. This tendency was taken so far that plans for the murder of Fidel Castro were discussed at high levels in the White House. Was it

not Washington that had launched the offensive against Cuba in 1961? Was it not Washington that sent innumerable bands of subversives, spies and provocateurs to Cuba? Were they not given help in these endeavours by reactionary regimes in Latin America? Mercenaries were trained at bases in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, nearly all the Latin American governments accorded with orders from Washington to break off diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba and take part in the economic blockade of the Isle of Freedom. Did this not comprise interference in the affairs of Cuba and did it not give the latter the moral right to take measures to defend their revolution and support other peoples in their just struggle against imperialism and other forms of oppression? One could question the expediency and timing of such activities, or their specific form, or urge coordination and agreement with local revolutionary movements, but the moral right to such conduct is indisputable.

This was repeatedly and openly pointed out by Fidel and other Cuban revolutionaries and was stated in the First and Second Havana Declarations. Che added his voice as well.

At his last appearance at the UN General Assembly in New York in December 1964 Che said in a polemic with the enemies of the Cuban Revolution: "I am a Cuban and also an Argentine and, no insult intended to the honourable señores from Latin America, I consider myself no less a Latin American patriot than anyone else and I am prepared, at any time, as the need arises, to give my life for the liberation of any of the Latin American countries, without asking anything in return, making no demands, and exploiting no one."

These were not mere words uttered as yet another barb against the enemies of the Cuban Revolution. The man who spoke them already knew that in the near future he was to carry them out in deed. He wanted this with all his heart, for revolution and revolution alone was his element....

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After his return to Cuba on March 14, 1965 Che made no public appearances. The fact was noted by Cubans as well as by foreign journalists and observers. As time passed Che's "absence" or "disappearance" drew more and more attention and engendered a spate of rumours and commentary. The reactionary press



in the USA made the wildest guesses of all: Che "was arrested", he "fled Cuba", he "was killed" or he "was fatally ill". The fact remained that Che had indeed disappeared and was nowhere to be seen in Cuba. In the middle of April his mother Celia, then in a hospital in Buenos Aires, received a strange letter from Che, in which he talked of his intention of leaving public activity, spending a month cutting sugar cane and then moving in with Alberto Granados and working for five years in a factory as a labourer. Of course it could be interpreted as one of Che's habitual games, for he was known to be fond of mystifying his friends and relatives. However, his disappearance seemed to add a dramatic implication to the letter.

On April 20, 1965, Fidel Castro, interviewed by foreign journalists while he was engaged in cutting sugar cane in Camagüey, made his first public comment on Che's whereabouts: "All that I can say about Major Che is that he will always be where he is most useful to the revolution, and that our relationship is excellent. It is as good and perhaps even better than when we first met."

Fidel Castro's statement indirectly confirmed that Guevara was nowhere in Cuba. Early in May Celia telephoned Havana from the hospital in Buenos Aires and asked to speak with her son. She was answered that Che was in good health but not in the vicinity and that he would contact her if possible. Celia died on May 10, 1965, never having received a call from him. This meant that Che was no longer on the island. But then where was he? The bourgeois newspapers continued to advance the most fantastic theories, writing that he was in Vietnam, Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador. In connection with events in the Dominican Republic, where an uprising of patriotic-minded military forces began on April 24, 1965, the newspapers argued that Che was taking an active part in the struggle of the constitutionalists and even that he was killed there. The American magazine *Newsweek* reported on July 9 that Che had sold "Cuban secrets" for ten million dollars and then went into hiding. The Uruguayan weekly *Marcha* asserted that Che was "resting, writing and working" in Oriente Province, while the London *Evening Post* stated that he was in China.

Only one conclusion could be drawn from all these inventions of the bourgeois press, namely, that his present address and situation remained a mystery. The only persons in the know were the

Cuban leadership, Che himself and those in direct contact with him, and despite the enemy's frantic efforts to pick up the trail of this vanished revolutionary for the time being the cards were kept close to the table.

On June 17 Fidel again publicly referred to Che, but just as obscurely as previously: "We have no obligation of accounting for Che's whereabouts." However, he added that Che was in good health. When asked when word would be heard of Guevara, Fidel answered: "When Major Che so wishes. What do we know about it? Nothing. What do we think about it? We think that Major Che has always acted in a revolutionary way and will continue to do so."

It was only on October 3, 1965 that Fidel Castro partially lifted the heavy curtain concealing Che up to that time. Speaking at the Constituent Session of the Central Committee of the CPC, Fidel Castro said:

"Our Central Committee marks the absence of a man who in the maximum degree deserves to be included in this organ and has all the necessary qualities for it. This man, however, is not among the members of our Central Committee.

"Our enemies have managed to fabricate an entire web of slander around this fact. Our enemies are trying to confuse people and provoke uneasiness and doubt. As far as we are concerned we have been biding our time, for this was necessary....

"All kinds of soothsayers, interpreters, 'specialists on Cuba' and computers have been working without respite to figure out the riddle. They've tried every variant: Ernesto Guevara has been 'purged', Ernesto Guevara is ill, Ernesto Guevara has fallen out with the leadership, and so forth and so on.

"The people of course trust and believe in us. But our enemies spread such rumours, mainly abroad, in order to smear us with slander: there you have it, that fearsome, evil communist regime, people disappear without a trace and with no explanation. As for us, we told the people when they began to notice his absence that when necessary we would tell all, but for the time being we had our reasons for remaining silent....

"In explanation we shall read this letter—here is the handwritten original and here is a typed copy. The letter is from Comrade Ernesto Guevara, who will speak for himself. I thought that perhaps here it would be necessary to talk about the history of our friendship, our comradeship, about how this friendship

began and how it evolved. But it's not really necessary. Instead I shall limit myself to reading the letter.

"It is not dated, for it was to be made public whenever we considered it most expedient. But if we are sticklers for the facts, it may be said that the letter was handed over on April 1 of this year, that is exactly six months and two days ago. It reads:

" 'Havana (the Year of Agriculture)

" 'Fidel!

" 'At this moment my mind goes back to our first meeting in María Antonia's home, how you proposed the trip, and all of the feverish preparations.

" 'Once we were asked who should be notified in case of death and we were all amazed by the reality that such an outcome was indeed possible. Then we learned that it was true, that in a revolution (a real one that is) you either win or die. Many were buried along the road to victory.

" 'Today things are couched in less dramatic terms, for we all are more mature, but still the situation remains the same. I feel that I have partially fulfilled the duty which tied me to the Cuban Revolution on the island and I part with you, with my comrades, and with your people who have become my own.

" 'I officially resign my post in the Party leadership, my post as minister, my rank as major and give up my Cuban citizenship. Officially I no longer have connections with Cuba, except for the connections of a different kind that cannot be given up like my posts.

" 'Looking over my past I feel that I worked fairly honestly and devotedly and tried to consolidate the victory of the revolution. My only serious mistake was that my faith in you was not still greater from the very first moments in the Sierra Maestra, that I was too slow in estimating your qualities as a leader and revolutionary. I lived through remarkable times and next to you I felt proud that I belonged to our people in the most heated and difficult days of the Caribbean crisis.

" 'Your talent as a politician has rarely shone as clearly as it did then and I am also proud that I supported you unhesitatingly, that our thoughts were the same and that our views on the principles and dangers of the matter were identical.

" 'Now my small services are needed in other parts of the world. I can do that which is denied to you, for you bear a responsibility to Cuba, so the time has come to part.

" 'You must understand that I feel both joy and sorrow, I am leaving behind my brightest hopes of a builder and people dearest to me.... I am leaving behind a people which accepted me as a son and this brings me pain. I am taking with me into the new field of battle the faith which you have inspired in me, the revolutionary spirit of my people, the awareness that I am carrying out my most sacred duty, that of struggling against imperialism wherever it exists, and this increases my determination, compensating many times over for the pain incurred.

" 'I repeat that I free Cuba of all responsibility save that of being an example for others. And if my final hour comes while I am far away my last thoughts will be about this people and especially about you. I thank you for what you have taught me and for your example, and I shall try to remain faithful to the

end. I always identified myself with the foreign policy of our revolution and continue to do so to this day. Wherever I may go I shall always be aware of my responsibility as a Cuban revolutionary, and shall act accordingly. I leave my children and my wife without any property and this does not upset me. I am glad that it is so. I ask nothing for them because the state will give them sufficient to live on and to receive an education.

"I could say much more to you and to our people, but I feel that it would be superfluous. Words cannot express all that I would like to communicate and there is no use in wasting the paper.

" 'Always for Victory! Homeland or Death!

" 'I embrace you with true revolutionary fervour

" 'Che.' ”<sup>1</sup>

Fidel finished the letter and said:

"For those who talk about revolutionaries and consider them cold, passionless, heartless—let this letter serve as an example of those feelings, that nobility and purity which can be concealed in the heart of a revolutionary....

"This is not the only letter. Other farewell letters were written and put aside for this moment to be read together. They are addressed to various comrades and to, as is written, 'my parents' and 'my children'. We shall hand over these letters to the comrades and relatives they are addressed to and ask them that they make them a gift to the revolution for we consider these to be documents worthy of preservation for the historical record.

"We assume that this explains everything, that is everything that must be explained. Let our enemies worry about the rest. We have enough work, enough questions to be solved, both at home and internationally; enough obligations which we must and shall fulfil."

The letters mentioned by Fidel, at least two of them, were later published; one in the Argentine journal *Siete días ilustrados* on May 23, 1967, and the other posthumously. Since they were written at the same time as the letter to Fidel, we insert them here:

"To my parents

"Dear old folk!

"Once again I dig my heels into Rocinante's ribs and set forth dressed in my armour.

"About ten years ago I wrote you another farewell letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Che ends the letter with the famous slogans of the Cuban Revolution: "*Hasta la Victoria Siempre! Patria o Muerte!*"—Ed.

"As far as I can remember I regretted that I wasn't a better soldier or doctor. The second no longer interests me, but I'm not such a bad soldier now.

"Basically nothing has changed since that time if you exclude the fact that I'm aware of a lot more, my Marxism has taken firm roots and been clarified. I believe that armed struggle is the only way out for the peoples fighting for their liberation and I am consistent in my views. There are many who would call me an adventure seeker and they are right. But I seek adventure of a specific type, I am the kind who risk their skin to prove that they are right.

"It may be that this is the last attempt for me. I'm not looking for such an end, but logically it falls within the range of the possible. If it happens that way, then take this last embrace from me.

"I have loved you deeply but could never express this love. I am too direct in my actions and think that sometimes people misunderstood me. Moreover, it was not all that easy to understand me, but this time do believe what I'm saying. So, the determination which I have perfected with the devotion of an artist now forces my weak legs and tired lungs to work. I shall carry out my plans.

"Remember from time to time this humble condottiere of the twentieth century.

"Give my love to Celia, Roberto, Juan Martín, Patotín, Beatriz, to everybody.

"Your prodigal and incorrigible son embraces you warmly.

"Ernesto."

*"To my children*

"Dear Hildita, Alcídita, Camilo, Celia and Ernesto!

"If some time you read this letter it will mean that I am no longer with you.

"You will not remember much of me and the little ones will recall nothing.

"Your father was a man who acted according to his views and certainly lived according to his convictions.

"You should grow up to be good revolutionaries. Study diligently and master the technology which allows us to control nature. Remember that what is most important is revolution and that each of us individually is insignificant.

"And most important, always retain a deep sensitivity to all injustice, wherever it takes place in the world. That is the most admirable quality of a revolutionary.

"Farewell, children, I hope to see you again.

"Your papa sends you a huge kiss and a big hug."

After Che's death still another farewell letter was published. It was addressed to his daughter Hilda and dated February 15, 1966. We still don't know where it was written, but these were the contents:

"Dear Hildita!

"I am writing to you today, but you will receive the letter much later. Remember that I am thinking of you and hoping that you will be happy on your birthday. You are almost a woman now so I can't write you like a child, filling this letter with idle gibberish.

"You should know that I am far away and will remain here for a long time,

doing everything in my power in the struggle against our enemies. My contribution isn't much but it is something and I hope that you can always be proud of your father as I am of you.

"Remember that there are many years of struggle ahead and that even when you become a grown-up you must make your own contribution to this struggle. In the meantime you should prepare yourself to be a good revolutionary, and at your age this means studying hard, with all your strength, and always be ready to support a just cause. Moreover, you should listen to your Mother and not think too highly of yourself. That will come with time.

"Work to become one of the best in your school. I mean best in all respects and you know what I have in mind: the study and revolutionary conduct or, in other words, a serious approach to work, love of homeland and revolution, comradeship and so on. I wasn't that way at your age but I grew up in a different society where men were enemies of one another. You have the good fortune of living in a different time, and you must live up to this privilege.

"Don't forget to look after the little ones from time to time and to advise them to study hard and behave themselves well. Most of all look after Aleidita, who looks up to you with great respect as her elder sister.

"Alright, old lady, once again I wish you a Happy Birthday. Give Mama and Gina a hug for me and accept a huge, warm embrace from me to last for the entire period of our separation.

"Your papa."

What do these highly dramatic letters, and especially the farewell message to Fidel, indicate? First of all, the fact that Che had finally and irrevocably left the revolutionary Cuba which had given him world fame. But this act was not the consequence of either forced or voluntary exile and it by no means meant his withdrawal from revolutionary activity. It could not be explained by disillusionment with the revolution, by desperation, impetuosity or by the love of adventure which Che recognised with his characteristic self-deprecation. His departure was not an act of suicidal implications of the man who has reached a political dead end and looks for a heroic death on the field of battle as a way out.

Che left Cuba in order to fight, weapon in hand, against the imperialists, not only because he considered this a sacred duty but because he himself passionately wanted to join the fray.

An enormous gulf separated the Che of 1956, the unknown Argentine doctor who was driven by circumstances to Mexico and by chance made contact with the group of Cuban revolutionaries headed by Fidel Castro, and the Che of 1965, one of the leaders of the victorious revolution and a world-renowned figure of the revolutionary government, now suddenly leaving Cuba in search of new revolutionary exploits.

In the middle of the 1950s social revolution and socialism in Latin America still seemed an unattainable dream, a hope for the distant future. When he joined Fidel's unit Che assumed that he was linking up with an extremely hazardous, and even irrational undertaking, pursuing, to be sure, a noble and elevated goal, but with heavy odds in favour of failure.

A "miracle" happened and the undertaking ended in victory. The Cuban Revolution evolved into a socialist revolution, fundamentally changing the political panorama in Latin America. With the victory in Cuba anti-imperialist revolution became a matter of immediate concern rather than an abstract slogan.

Now, setting off to "make a revolution" in Latin America Che was not a solitary revolutionary Don Quixote, hoping to throw his life and limb against imperialism possessing something more than windmills. Behind him was the rich experience of the Cuban Revolution.

He left Cuba in search of victory over imperialism, for he was firmly convinced that he could and must make a contribution to this victory. Why then were his messages to Fidel and his relatives cloaked in such tragic, even gloomy tones, why do they take the form of a farewell? What is this, a presentiment of inescapable death or just another instance of Che's irrepressible black humour?

Che's revolutionary romanticism—total selflessness, modesty, ascetism and a readiness to sacrifice—was accompanied by a strain of anti-romanticism, a scorn for overblown rhetoric, for all manifestations of cheap sentimentalism, for petty-bourgeois intellectual "sensitivity". This enemy of any dogmatisms was dogmatic in his own way. One of these dogmas was a disdain for death which had lain in wait for him since childhood, and particularly during the years of guerrilla struggle in Cuba. Revolution is a type of warfare, and where there is fighting death also stalks. In war no one has a guarantee against death, regardless of courage or intelligence. As a soldier Che well understood this. This gave the tonality to his messages.

If we take a larger perspective on Che's decision to leave Cuba in search of new "revolutionary horizons" it will not seem such an unusual and extravagant decision after all. What true revolutionary, true Communist, be he rank and file or a general, has not dreamed of going to fight as a volunteer in the struggle to win the freedom of other nations.

Didn't the ranks of the revolutionaries fighting in Russia include the Pole Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Yugoslav Oleco Dundić, the Czech Yaroslav Hašek and the American John Reed?

Revolutionary Spain is another case in point. How Soviet people rushed to the aid of the Spanish people, to fight in the ranks of the Republican Army against fascism. We know that Soviet fighter pilots, tankmen and officers fought with weapon in hand in Spain. And in yet another case, didn't Marshal Blyukher also fight for the freedom of the Chinese people? Such examples could be cited endlessly. And those who went off to fight, either on native or foreign soil, also wrote farewell letters to Party leaders, relatives and close friends.

Those Cuban revolutionaries who left Cuba with Che also left such farewell letters. While parting, they like Che believed in victory, in the triumph of the cause for which they were setting out to fight, and for which they were leaving their land, their relatives and friends....

Not all of these letters have been uncovered so far. Passages from one of them were published in 1969, and a year later another letter was unearthed. The author of the first was Captain Eliseo Reyes Rodriguez (known in Bolivia as Rolando), member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, an outstanding participant in the guerrilla war in Cuba who served under Che in the Eighth Column. He left behind him a wife and three young children. On November 16, 1966, before his departure for Bolivia, he wrote his wife Nely Barreras:

"It is not easy to part but I know that you understand as well as I that an honest person will always make sacrifices to fulfil his most sacred duty, that of combating imperialism.

"Be brave. I hope that our children will, if I die in battle, replace me as soon as their age permits and will feel the same indignation as we do about the sufferings and poverty of the other kindred peoples.

"It may be that some time will pass before you hear from me. Don't forget, however, that despite the distance and time separating us, I will always be with you in thought.

"On the one hand, I feel pain in leaving those dear to me—you, my children, my parents, but, on the other hand, I feel relief in knowing that I am doing this for the struggle against an enemy who is depriving millions of people of those near and dear to them.

"Look after yourself and watch over the children, please love my mother. You and my revolutionary homeland are what is most valuable to me in life.

"I will be thinking of you at the moment of death if it turns out that I must die in struggle."



Below we reproduce another letter. Like the preceding one it casts light on the moral and political motives prompting the Cuban revolutionaries to take part in the guerrilla struggle in Bolivia. The author, Captain Jesús Suárez Gayol (known as Rubio in Bolivia), was born in a peasant family and moved directly from the school-desk to participation in the underground movement against Batista. He was arrested several times, lived in emigration in the USA and Mexico, from where he returned in April 1958 to fight against the tyrant. During an attack on a radio station a bomb explosion severely burned his legs. Despite this he joined the Eighth Column and fought in its ranks until the victory of the revolution. After the overthrow of Batista Jesús held a number of responsible posts, working as the head administrator of the agrarian reform in Las Villas Province, Head of the Flour Trust and of the Institute of Mineral Resources and, from 1964 on, as Deputy Minister of the Sugar Industry. Setting out for Bolivia, Suárez Gayol left a letter to his young son Jesús Félix:

"December 2, 1966.

"Comrade Jesús Félix Suárez,

"Havana, Cuba.

"Dear son!

"There are many reasons urging me to write you this letter. The circumstances are quite unusual, and you will read the letter later when you grow up and will be fully able to understand the decision I have taken....

"Today is your fourth birthday. You are my hope for the future. You gave me much happiness in the few moments when I could be next to you. You are my only son and I think it would be unforgivable to set out in fulfilment of my revolutionary duty and risk death in battle without writing you, without telling you at least a few of the thoughts I would pass on if you were next to me.

"I had the unusual good luck to live through a decisive period in our history. Cuba, our homeland, our people, are making one of the greatest epochs in human history. Cuba is carrying out a revolution under the most unfavourable conditions and emerging victorious over every threat and aggression directed against her....

"The Cuban Revolution is a living example pointing the way of liberation to other peoples exploited by imperialism that feeds on their blood. These peoples cannot build their own future as we are doing. There the labour of millions of men and women makes a handful of exploiters richer. There thousands and thousands of children of your age or even younger are dying through the lack of medical care, many are deprived of schools and teachers and their lot is that of poverty and ignorance—the inevitable accompaniment of exploitation.

"That is why at this stage the duty of the Cuban revolutionary extends beyond the confines of our state and leads him to where exploitation still exists and where imperialism drains off the blood of the people.

"Such an understanding of revolutionary duty obliges me to leave my homeland and set out to fight against imperialism in other countries. I know what confronts me, I leave behind my strongest attachments, my dearest friends and kin, but at the same time I am boundlessly happy and proud to take up a position in the front lines of the people's bitter struggle against exploitation.

"Of all those close to me you, my son, are the dearest. I would love to be with you, help bring you up and watch you become a man and a revolutionary. But since, because of my decision, this is unlikely to happen, I hope that my example and the spiritual legacy which I leave to you and which is my life wholly given to the revolution and the education which you will receive in a revolutionary country, will more than compensate for my absence.

"I hope that you will understand my decision and never criticise me for it. I hope, a legitimate hope for a father, that you will be proud of me. Let my decision be a source of happiness for you, since I will be unable to give you all the other small pleasures a father gives his son.

"I would like you to apply yourself to your studies and prepare yourself as best as possible for the fulfilment of revolutionary tasks. I think, or at least I hope, that you will never have to take up weapons to fight for the well-being of humanity. You will act in the realm of science, technology or some other area of creativity. You may also struggle for justice in these fields, there you may also show heroism and win praise, if as a revolutionary you devote passion and energy to your work.

"Always be vigilant and defend your revolution with vigour and determination. It cost much blood and is of great value for the peoples of the world.

"I hope that you will always be honest, consistent and kind. Always stick to the truth no matter how bitter it may be. Take criticism into account but also be firm in defending your opinion if you are convinced that you are right.

"Reject servility and fawning and never be an apple polisher yourself. Always be your own severest critic.

"When you read this letter you will probably already know the wonderful lines of José Martí. There is a poem of his called 'Yugo y Estrella'. Read it and think over the meaning. Remember, that in your choice of direction in life I hope you will always prefer the 'star that illumines and kills'.

"Be a worthy son of your homeland!

"Be a revolutionary.

"*A Communist!*

"A hug from your father,  
Jesús Suárez Gayol."

Seventeen Cuban revolutionaries took part in the events in Bolivia and of them 14 perished. All were younger than 35 and all had families with children.

Thus, Che left or decided to leave Cuba roughly in April 1965. In any case after April 1965 he was no longer officially in Cuba. His tracks disappear to be recovered only in November 1966 in Bolivia. We have no precise information indicating Che's whereabouts during this interval of 19 months. The press averred after his death that he had been in Black Africa taking part in the civil

war in the Congo. There are hints of this in his *Bolivian Diary*. It is conceivable that Che really was in Africa, in whose fate he evinced a lively interest; or perhaps he was somewhere else, and from there returned to Cuba. Perhaps he remained in Cuba after April 1965. We do not know. The Cuban sources that alone could clear up the mystery are for the time being silent.

But this is not absolutely essential for our narrative. It goes without saying that Che did not remain idle during this year and a half. He must have been linked up with dozens of people in this period and if we still know nothing specific about his activities this serves as proof of Che's skill as a conspirator as well as the dedication to him of the people with whom he was working.

Was Che making preparations for the Bolivian expedition? To judge by the story of Tania, the young German revolutionary who died in Bolivia, Che began such preparations at least a year before his "disappearance" from Cuba. This account was related in the book *Tania, the Unforgettable Guerrilla Fighter*, published in Havana in 1970 with a foreword by Inti (Guido Alvaro Peredo Leigue), a Bolivian revolutionary, a friend and companion of Che in Bolivia.

Tania was the pseudonym of Tamara, the daughter of the German Communists Erich and Nadia Bunke, teachers who with their newly born first child fled the Nazi terror in 1935 to settle in Argentina where they had relatives. Here on November 19, 1937 Nadia gave birth to Tamara, or Ita (a diminutive of Tamarita) as her family called her. She was an attractive and gifted girl, well versed in politics and literature and a lover of music. She played the piano, guitar and accordion, and during her school years took voice and ballet lessons and went in for sports.

Tamara's parents were active participants in the underground communist movement in Argentina. Their daughter grew up surrounded by underground activities, secret meetings and political arguments. Her mother Nadia recalled: "We explained to our children in simple and accessible terms that we were fighting in the interests of all mankind and of the Argentine people, and we described the significance of the October Revolution. We told them that we were fighting for a new society such as existed in the Soviet Union but that our work was both difficult and dangerous. We warned them that the police persecuted our kind and that caution and discretion were necessary, that no one should be told

of the meetings of the underground Communist Party in our home."

In 1952 the Bunke family returned to the German Democratic Republic where Erich then worked as a physical education teacher and Nadia taught the Russian language. There Tamara studied Romance languages in Humboldt University in Berlin. She joined the Union of Socialist Youth and then the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

Regarding herself as both Argentine and German, Tamara closely followed political developments in Latin America and dreamed of returning to Argentina to take part in the revolutionary struggle.

Naturally, she was overjoyed by the news of the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Her solidarity with the Isle of Freedom was further increased when in the middle of 1960 she met with the first Cuban official delegation headed by Captain Antonio Núñez Jiménez, and in December of that year with the trade delegation headed by Che. Tamara worked as an interpreter for these delegations and personally for Che, an Argentine—her compatriot. Meetings with the Cubans, their charm, simplicity, candour and revolutionary enthusiasm made a deep impression on Tamara. She sought avenues to travel to Cuba to take part in the revolutionary changes there. On May 12, 1961 her dream was fulfilled. She arrived in Havana where she worked in the Ministry of Education, studied in the Department of Journalism at Havana University, joined the revolutionary militia, took part in voluntary work and in a number of mass campaigns, worked as an interpreter with German delegations and sometimes met with her compatriot Che.

The Cuban Revolution won Tamara's sympathies and enthusiasm. She wanted to become a professional revolutionary and devote her entire life to "the struggle for the liberation of mankind". She took these words by Nikolai Ostrovsky<sup>1</sup> as the

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904-1936)—an active participant in the Civil War in Russia and post-revolution endeavours of the Soviet Republic in the first decade of its existence. Struck down by a tragic disease (paralysis of the joints and complete loss of sight, the result of old wounds), took to writing. His first book *How the Steel Was Tempered*, an essentially autobiographical novel, depicted the life experiences of his generation with striking vividness. The book has gained wide renown and become a classic of world literature.—Ed.

epigraph for her diary. In Havana she worked a stint with representatives of the United Front of Nicaragua which was responsible for guerrilla activities in its country. She dreamed of becoming a guerrilla and underground worker.

Once again her wishes were fulfilled. Revolutionary Cuba was under siege by American imperialists and had to defend herself. In March 1963 Cuban comrades suggested that she join an underground, travel to Latin America and work with the revolutionary movement there. Tamara was only too happy to comply. The mission she was entrusted with was both important and dangerous, one worthy of a true revolutionary. She was proud of the confidence shown in her and employed all her skill, knowledge and strength to justify it. And so Tamara became the underground worker Tania.

Months of exhausting, detailed and comprehensive preparations followed. She studied the secret codes, script, radio signals and rules of underground work. The training was thorough and lasted a year. From the biography of Tania we learn what happened further.

"When she finished her training in March 1964 Tania experienced, in her words, 'the biggest excitement in my life'. Major Che Guevara invited her to visit him at the Ministry of Industry so that he could finally explain her mission....

"Up to that time Tania had remained in the dark concerning the specifics of her mission. She studied the situation in various Latin American and even some European countries but did not know where she was destined to work. She asked Tania if she had the knowledge necessary to carry on underground revolutionary work and if she was frightened of the hardships and deprivations associated with it. Tania answered Che firmly, laconically and precisely that she was only waiting for her orders and was ready to carry them out at any moment. They talked for several hours about the political and economic situation in Latin America, about the advanced revolutionary movements which had entered the stage of armed struggle in a number of South American countries. Che explained to her that her mission included moving to Bolivia, establishing ties with army and government circles, becoming familiar with the situation in the country's hinterlands, studying the forms and methods by which the Bolivian miners, peasants and industrial workers were exploited, setting up useful contacts and, finally, waiting for the messenger who would tell her

when the decisive actions should begin and give her more precise information on her role in the forthcoming struggle. Che warned Tania to wait for the messenger who would be sent directly from Havana. No matter how difficult her position she was in no case to look for a contact, ask for help or give away her identity to any individual, organisation or party, even if he or it was established as revolutionary in Bolivia. The main thing was to be absolutely, universally and unfailingly distrustful."

The above passage from the biography of Tania is highly significant in that it reveals that as early as March 1964 the Bolivian expedition was being planned under Che's direct leadership. The fact gives additional confirmation that all the conjectures by the adversaries of the Cuban Revolution, presenting Che's departure as an "unexpected" decision, as a result of his "disillusionment" or as the hidden urge for martyrdom are mere idle speculation.

What, then, was taking place in Latin America in March 1964? In Brazil the Goulart Government was stepping up its opposition to US imperialism. The peasant leagues led by Francisco Julião, an ardent supporter of the Cuban Revolution, were expanding. In Venezuela, Colombia and Peru guerrilla units were active. A guerrilla unit led by Jorge Ricardo Masetti was making its first tentative steps in Argentina. Che hoped that Masetti could gain a foothold in the strategic triangle bordering on Chile, Bolivia and Paraguay. In Bolivia itself power was in the hands of President Paz Estenssoro, whose activities Che had witnessed during his first visit to that country.

In March 1964 Bolivia still maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, breaking them off as late as August 20, 1964 under US pressure. It is possible that at the time a partisan base could be set up in Bolivian territory with the tacit agreement of the Bolivian authorities, and this base could have served as a bulwark and rear for guerrilla groups operating in Argentina and Peru. In any case the then Vice-President of Bolivia, leader of the Workers' Centre of Bolivia (Central Obrera Boliviana) Juan Lechín, spoke openly in support of the Cuban Revolution. Moreover, under Paz Estenssoro the miners were armed and formed people's militia at the mines. To be sure, the militia leadership followed the government orientation, nevertheless the armed miners could in certain conditions serve as the foundation for a more active revolutionary—including guerrilla—movement.

But while in March 1964 the prospects for revolution in Latin America were extremely encouraging, by the end of the year the situation had taken a change for the worse: the unit in Argentina collapsed without even beginning its activities and its leader was killed. In Brazil Goulart was overthrown by reactionary generals. The same fate overtook Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia, whose place was taken by General René Barrientos Ortuño.

Of course, such events could be interpreted differently: the seizure of power by reactionaries in Bolivia and Brazil increased the urgency of organising guerrilla activities against these regimes, and the success of such activities could fundamentally alter the balance of forces in Latin America in favour of anti-imperialism. Meanwhile on April 9, 1964 Tania made her way to Western Europe on a false passport and spent several months there training as an underground worker. Now she was Laura Gutiérrez Bauer, a native-born Argentine and amateur ethnographer, a daughter of an Argentine rancher and a German anti-fascist. On November 5 Tania arrived safely in Lima, the capital of Peru, on the same day as the defeated Paz Estenssoro arrived there from La Paz. On November 18, 1964, Tania finally reached her goal—La Paz.

This young and charming Argentine, fluent in several languages and showing no visible lack of money, was soon admitted to the new government circles which had come to power with the fall of Paz Estenssoro. She established a friendly relation with Gonzalo López Muñoz, Chief of the Presidential Information Department. Through a recommendation from Muñoz Tania began working for a local weekly while simultaneously employed in the Department of Folklore under the Ministry of Education. The ruling and particularly military circles in Bolivia were well disposed towards Germans and people of German origin. For a number of years after the First World War German officers were used to train the Bolivian Army. Between 1937 and 1939 the president of the country was Lt. Col. Germán Busch, the son of a German immigrant and an Indian, a man of wide popularity. Tania was quick to take advantage of this Germanophilism to widen her contacts. In order to strengthen her hand Tania married a student named Mário Martínez Álvarez, thereby gaining Bolivian citizenship. Soon after their marriage Álvarez left to continue his studies in Europe. Evidence of the extent of Tania's penetration of the Bolivian "elite" is offered by the fact that she even managed to mix

with President General René Barrientos whom she met during a fiesta.

Havana maintained quite a reliable connection with Tania through messengers. She met them both in Bolivia and abroad where she made special trips for that set purpose. At this early stage the Bolivian operation developed according to script. Havana was well informed of the position of the Barrientos government, which was being conspired against by its own supporters.

Nevertheless, the situation for Barrientos was not as precarious as it seemed at first sight. Barrientos flirted with the peasants, posing as their friend and benefactor and achieving a measure of success at that. The revolutionaries, for their part, often display overoptimism, too confident of their own strength. This is understandable, for without a high degree of optimism it is hard to rally to the struggle, but still....

While Tania entered Bolivia on a forged passport and took up permanent residence there another trusted agent of Havana, the 23-year-old Régis Debray, travelled throughout Bolivia and the adjacent republics under his true identity in late 1963 and early 1964.

A philosophy student at the Sorbonne, Debray was taking a qualification course in the USA in 1959 when he left for Cuba and was received by the leadership there who introduced him to the revolution in progress. After this Debray spent a year and a half travelling in Latin America. He did some filming in Venezuela for French television, then spent roughly three months in Bolivia gathering material for his dissertation on the social situation of the Indians of the Andes uplands. In Bolivia Debray gave lectures in La Paz, Cochabamba and Oruro, met with numerous politicians and maintained contact with the cultural attaché to the French Embassy in La Paz.

In 1965 Debray published his first works giving his interpretation of significance of the Cuban Revolution for Latin America. An article entitled "Latin America: Some Problems of Revolutionary Strategy" was published in January in *Les Temps Modernes*, and "Castroism: Latin America's Long March" was released in the Cuban journal *Casa de las Americas* in the latter half of the year.

After his travels through Latin America Régis Debray again appeared in Cuba in the end of 1965—that is, when Che was no longer there—and delved into the history of the revolutionary



movement in Cuba. He talked with participants in the guerrilla movement, including Fidel Castro, and studied documents. "He had access to numerous unpublished documents, preserved from that time [of the revolution]: field orders, instructions to the commanders, military reports, letters and other material," wrote Roberto Fernández Retamar, editor of the above-mentioned Cuban journal. "This allowed him to become well acquainted with the historical events. No one else who wrote of the Cuban Revolution had at his disposal such a wealth of material and facts for his research."

The outcome of these studies was the book *Revolution in the Revolution?* published for mass circulation in Havana in early 1967. Today the book has been all but forgotten, but when first published it made a big splash and was the bible of supporters of guerrilla warfare "at all costs". Debray tried to give a theoretical underpinning to the guerrilla methods of struggle against imperialism using the Cuban experience to base his argument that such methods were the only ones applicable in the Latin American context.

Debray's book reflected the arguments and disagreements which had arisen in the national liberation movement in Latin America after the victory of the Cuban Revolution.

This, wrote Rodney Arismendi, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Uruguay, "was a time of searching for ways, of theoretical discussions as well as of the emergence of certain leftist tendencies and of a crisis in the static concepts about the processes and distinguishing features of the Latin American revolution".

It is worth pausing over Debray's description of the possible difficulties confronting the development of a guerrilla movement in Bolivia: "Guerrilla nodes are originally located in relatively sparsely populated regions with only occasional settlements. No traveller or stranger passes unnoticed, say, in a settlement in the Andes uplands, and he first of all arouses suspicion. The Quechua and Maya peasants have good cause to distrust the 'stranger' or 'white man'. They know that elegant phrases will neither feed them nor protect them from air attacks. The poor peasant respects the person with power and ability to act above all. In these regions the system of oppression is highly refined; it has been in operation since time immemorial; it has become crystallised, ingrown and very compact. The troops, rural gendarmerie, landlord

police, and today the 'rangers' and green or black berets enjoy considerable authority which is reinforced by unthinking acceptance among the peasantry. This authority is the basic form of oppression. It paralyses dissatisfaction, imposes silence, and the sight alone of a uniform forces the peasants to tolerate insults without a murmur. The neocolonialist ideal still remains that of 'the show of force without using it', but in fact to show force is to use it. In other words, the physical might of the army and police represents a taboo which cannot be broken by words alone, but only by showing that soldiers and gendarmes are susceptible to bullets as well."

Was Che familiar with Debray's work? Yes, Debray gave him a copy of his book, arriving at the Bolivian "hearth" in March 1967. Che was not satisfied with the book and expressed his disagreement with the contents. At least that is what Debray himself, already incarcerated in a Bolivian prison, told journalists.

But now theoretical divergences on the "hearth" had lost all significance. The dies were cast and the time for action had come.

## **The Camp on the Ñancahuasu River**

**Thirty to fifty men are adequate to begin. With this number you can initiate an armed struggle in any of the Latin American countries.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

In March 1966 a Cuban called Ricardo (alias Chinchu) arrived in La Paz. This was Captain José María Martínez Tamayo who had fought in the Sierra Maestra. Ricardo was born in 1936 of a working family, worked as a tractor operator, became an aircraft pilot after the revolution, and once served in tank units. In 1962, according to a report in *Granma* he had "carried out an important mission in support of the revolutionary movement in Guatemala". In 1963 Ricardo for the first time entered Bolivia on a secret mission using a forged Colombian passport. Soon he obtained Bolivian documents under the name of Ricardo Morales

Rodriguez, permitting him to enter and leave the country at will. In Bolivia Ricardo helped organise a secret camp on the Argentine border which was to become the support base for guerrilla actions in the Argentine province of Salta.

During his first visit to Bolivia Ricardo established ties with Inti and his brother Coco—Roberto Peredo Leigue. The brothers had participated in revolutionary activities from their school days. Inti led the Pioneer organisation, was an active leader in the Youth League and then became a Party Secretary in La Paz and member of the CC of the Communist Party of Bolivia. Coco was also an active revolutionary and a Youth League leader. He worked as a river boat skipper, a crocodile hunter and a truck driver. In 1962 and 1966 he visited Cuba and in 1964 and 1965 the Soviet Union for which he, like his brother, had profound admiration. He named his son Yuri after the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin.

Completing his mission in 1963 Ricardo returned to Cuba only to reappear in Bolivia two and a half years later. He made contact with Tania, Inti, Coco and other Bolivian confederates with whom he was acquainted and who had expressed their willingness to cooperate with him.

At the end of July two more Cubans arrived in La Paz: Pombo and Tuma. The first was Captain Harry Villegas Tamayo and the second Lt. Carlos Coello. The latter entered Che's diary alternately as Tumaini and Rafael. Both had entered Bolivia on Colombian passports.

A major task confronting Pombo's group was to find a farm or estate in a rural area which could serve as a base for training, and possibly, for future guerrilla operations. At first Pombo and his friends were tempted to purchase a parcel of land in Alto Beni district in northern Bolivia. Then they changed their minds and decided to look for a place in the south-east.

The region they settled on was closer to Argentina. In terms of guerrilla warfare the location had both advantages and drawbacks. The former stemmed from the fact that the region was largely covered with wild undergrowth and sparsely populated, with the inhabitants engaged mainly in hunting and livestock-breeding. It was also important that this was the site of oil fields owned by the American Bolivia Gulf Oil Company. It could be expected that the oil-field workers would lend their support to the partisans. As for drawbacks, water was scarce, forcing a dependence on rivers, and the area was swarming with poisonous

midges and ticks, making it nearly uninhabitable. The zone was situated at an extreme distance from the mining centres, which were the sources of the most militant elements of the working class; the basic population was comprised of Guaraní Indians working small rented plots or dwarf holdings and extremely backward and ignorant in political terms.

It was in this zone that in July 1966 Coco Peredo bought the now famous Calamina Ranch<sup>1</sup> for the sum of 30 thousand Bolivian pesos (2,500 dollars). The ranch included 1,227 hectares and was uninhabited except for the house facing the road. The Ñancahuasu River coursed nearby. Calamina was situated 285 kilometres south of the provincial centre of Santa Cruz, and not far from the town of Camiri, the centre of the Fourth Military District, and the base for units of the Fourth Division of the Bolivian Army. Such propinquity did not bode well for the future inhabitants of Calamina. Nearby there were two other settlements, Lagunillas and Gutiérrez, where provisions and other goods could be purchased in the event of need. Another drawback of Calamina was the fact that only three kilometres away lived a rich peasant named Ciro Algarrañáz, the former *Alcalde* (Mayor) of Camiri, where he owned a butcher shop. The road leading to Calamina passed by his holding, which of course allowed him to observe the movements of his neighbours. But the new residents of Calamina were to learn these details only later.

Meanwhile, in early September another Cuban arrived via Chile in La Paz on a fake Uruguayan passport. This one was Pacho (Pachungo), the underground sobriquet of Captain Alberto Fernandez Montes de Oca. Soon he left Bolivia, to return later with Che.

September also witnessed the arrival of Régis Debray—under his real name. From the conspiratorial point of view this was a dangerous move, for he was already known as an adherent of the Cuban Revolution and could draw upon himself the unwelcome attention not only of the Bolivian secret service but also of the CIA whose agents were active in this country and worked hand in glove with the Bolivian authorities.

The appearance of Debray in Bolivia could suggest to these agents that Che, whose whereabouts were still unknown, was in

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<sup>1</sup> The living quarters on the estate were covered with galvanised sheet-metal, called "calamina" in Spanish.

the country or soon would arrive there. This idea had the support of several newspapers which had pointed to Bolivia as Che's hiding place. The Mexican journalist Arnulfo Uzeta wrote in *Excelsior* (September 14, 1966) that Che had arrived in Bolivia from Brazil early in the year. Uzeta gave an almost exact description of Che's appearance at the time and asserted that he was using the pseudonym Ramón. To be sure, other newspapers printed different versions of Che's life at the time. Still, Debray's unconcealed arrival in Bolivia was certainly not without danger, either for him or for Che.

Tania's friend López Muñoz, Chief of the Presidential Information Department, accredited Debray as a journalist and gave him permission to travel freely throughout the country in pursuit of material for a book on the "geopolitical" status of Bolivia which he was purportedly writing. Debray began to journey through the regions where the guerrilla struggle was to be kindled, energetically buying up maps and photographing a variety of buildings and objects. During one such journey he ran into Ricardo's men, mistook them for Bolivians and tried to photograph them. It was only with difficulty that Ricardo slipped away from the insistent Frenchman. A few weeks later Debray left for Chile, and from there returned to Bolivia in February 1967.

Judging by the facts, Guevara arrived in La Paz in November 1966, travelling by plane from São Paulo (Brazil). Beardless, with a receding hairline, his hair dyed grey, and adorned with thick horn-rimmed glasses and a tie, he bore no resemblance to the world-famous Che. His appearance had so changed that when in Havana he slipped home to say goodbye to his wife and daughter Celia, his own daughter did not recognise him even after he took her into his arms and caressed her. Celia had said to Aleida: "Mama, look, this old man has fallen in love with me!"

Now this "old man" walked freely about the streets of the Bolivian capital, carrying in his pocket a Uruguayan passport identifying him as a businessman named Ramón Benítez Fernández. Che also had a second passport, similarly identifying him as a Uruguayan businessman, this time one Adolfo Mena González. It would be impossible to say exactly which of these Che used to enter Bolivia, for neither of them had an entry stamp registered in it.

A lot of water had flowed under the bridge since that time 13 years before when Che first entered Bolivia fascinated by the mirage of the 1952 revolution.

Although much in the world had changed, and Che himself had altered considerably, the situation in Bolivia remained virtually stagnant. The country was still under the yoke of mercenary generals and politicians, the miners eked out a miserable existence and the peasantry, basically comprised of Indians who spoke no Spanish, lived like their ancestors in poverty and ignorance. The revolutionary forces which even before had enjoyed only limited support, were now weakened by factional activity of the Trotskyites, Maoists, anarchists.... Nevertheless, Che was optimistic. He believed that guerrilla fighting would fundamentally alter the country's political climate in favour of the revolutionary forces.

By the time Che arrived in Bolivia the majority of the 17 Cubans who were to fight in his unit were already there. Like Debray Che obtained a document through Tania certifying Adolfo Mena González to be "a specially authorised delegate of the OAS, studying and gathering information on social and economic relations in Bolivia's rural regions". This document, stamped November 3, 1966, gave him the right to travel at will throughout the country.

Without lingering in La Paz, Ramón, as Che now began to call himself, set off with Pacho via Cochabamba for the Calamina Ranch where they arrived on November 7, 1966. The same evening Che made his first entry in his diary, which he was to keep up for 11 months until the last engagement in the Yuro Hollow on October 8 of the following year.

Che's diary, the publication of which caused a worldwide sensation, gives a very precise impression of his basic character traits and attitudes. The diary is a very candid and truthful document. Yet it is not a chronicle of Che's guerrilla unit. The fact is that in his diary Che focused mainly on the mistakes, frailties, and miscalculations with regard to both particular fighters and the unit as a whole. He provided detail on the weak and hesitating elements and was taciturn about those whose behaviour touched upon the heroic. Che regarded heroic behaviour as normal, and any deviation from this norm as meriting censure and rejection.

There is one other circumstance to keep in mind when reading the diary: the author speaks of himself only reluctantly and then mainly to point out his own shortcomings or mistakes. Still, he is

the protagonist and the initiator of the drama unfolding on these pages, it is his iron will and faith in the revolution which impelled both him and his comrades to carry out heroic feats under the old slogan "Victory or Death!", which has been the battle cry of the brave men of all nations fighting for the just cause from Numancia to Stalingrad.

With all the unbelievable, or more precisely, the grandiose tone of their undertaking, which according to its founders was to inflict a crushing defeat on American imperialism and ensure the triumph of socialism in America, and hence throughout the world, Che's diary does not include a single word or line suggesting quixotism. This is not the diary of a dreamer or romantic but of a sober revolutionary firmly convinced of the rightness of his cause. The author conceives of the struggle with imperialism as a long chain of victories and defeats. He would be incalculably happy to snare victory but he holds no fear of defeat, for he knows that those who will replace him will in any event raise high the banner of freedom and social justice, the banner of socialism, to the very summits of the Andes.

So what do the first pages of Ramón's diary talk about?

"A new stage is beginning today," says the entry for November 7, 1966. "We arrived at the ranch by night. As a whole the journey went well. Pachungo and I disguised ourselves appropriately, made our way to Cochabamba and met there with the necessary people. Then we made it here in two days, travelling in two jeeps separately.

"Before driving into the ranch we stopped the vehicles. Then we continued in one jeep to avoid arousing the suspicion of one of nearby peasants<sup>1</sup> who was saying that we are beginning the production of cocaine on the ranch. It is amusing to note that he considers the inexhaustible Tumaini to be the gang's chemist. Bigotes<sup>2</sup> recognised me after the second run past and almost fell into a ravine with the vehicle. We had to leave the jeep at the very edge of a cliff and walk about 20 kilometres to the ranch where three Party comrades were already waiting. When we arrived it was about midnight...."

The arrival of Che, whom the CIA and affiliated intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> Che is referring to the rich peasant *Ciro Algarrañáz*.

<sup>2</sup> Bigotes—Jorge Vázquez Machicado Viana, a Bolivian student, also called Loro or simply Jorge.

services had been hunting for a year and a half, must be marked as a major conspiratorial success. It was no less an achievement that 17 other Cubans taking part in his unit (four of whom were members of the CPC Central Committee) had also made it safely into Bolivia at that time. They had each arrived individually and soon joined Che at the guerrilla base near the Nancahuasu. Calamina became a storage dump for weapons, ammunition, medicine, cameras, radio and other communication equipment, food, books and guerrilla uniforms. All of this came from abroad or was purchased in La Paz and transported in small quantities to the camp on the Nancahuasu River. As such, the plan to set up a guerrilla base was so far proceeding smoothly.

Let us recall how the Cuban episode began. Fidel Castro's plans for a landing had been publicly announced by Batista whose troops sat in wait for the arrival of the *Granma*. During the first few days on Cuba the rebels suffered a catastrophe, losing four-fifths of their fighting strength, weapons and ammunition. After the battle at Alegría de Pío Fidel Castro had to rebuild his unit anew almost from scratch.

Now, this time the insurgents managed to establish themselves in the very heart of Latin America. They had modern weapons, supplies and a reserve of money. The initiative was in their hands and this time they were not in danger of sudden attack and defeat.

Joining the *Granma* expedition to Cuba Che had been travelling to a completely unfamiliar country. But he knew Bolivia well from his earlier stay there in 1953.

If we continue the comparison with the Cuban events, the Bolivian variant begins to lose the advantages so prominent at first glance. In Cuba, despite all the initial shortcomings, Fidel and his men were at home where the very walls are allies. Fidel could count on the help of supporters and sympathisers in all corners of the country.

In contrast, the core of the guerrilla unit in Bolivia was made up of foreigners, primarily Cubans, and led by a foreigner. And no matter what sympathy they enjoyed from revolutionary circles the local populace could look upon them as outsiders, and they could expect to meet preconceptions and mistrust.

Looked at in the international context the comparison also comes out unfavourably for Ramón's unit. When Fidel Castro began the struggle in the Sierra Maestra, it never occurred to the Americans that the conflict could result in the victory of a



socialist revolution in Cuba. Consequently, the shooting in the Sierra Maestra brought them no particular anxiety. A similar occurrence in the Bolivian mountains, however, could provoke a massive blow in response from Washington. To be sure, this fitted in Che's plans, but then who could vouch for a guerrilla victory in such a confrontation?

But for the time being at least, all the cards were stacked in favour of the new inhabitants of Calamina.

On November 8 and 9 Che made brief excursions into the neighbouring jungle. What he saw pleased him. On November 9 he wrote in his diary: "With adequate discipline we should be able to hold out a long time here."

However, on November 10, disturbed by the curiosity of their neighbour Algarañáz, from whom the residents of Calamina were buying provisions, Che decided to move into the jungle and set up the central base there, eight kilometres from the farm. After his first overnight in the jungle, Che noted on November 11: "The number of insects here is unbelievable. You can only escape them by using a hammock with a net enclosure (and I'm the only one that has one)." The following day he added: "My hair is growing back, if slowly, the gray is beginning to disappear, a beard beginning to come out. A couple more months and I'll resemble my old self."

They built a bread-baking oven, benches and a table at the camp. From four to six in the afternoon every day political studies were held there. Che talked about the experience of the Cuban Revolution and about the skill of guerrilla warfare, while others taught the history and geography of Bolivia, the Spanish and Quechua languages. These studies were obligatory for all the guerrillas. After dinner in the evening Che taught French to those who desired.

Che organised the "gondola" or delivery of produce, weapons and other guerrilla necessities from Calamina to the base camp. This was exhausting work demanding daily treks carrying heavy loads. In the area of the base camp the guerrillas sought out secret niches and caves and dug trenches where they could hide their supplies. Che regarded their stay in this locality as temporary, although he calculated that it would always be possible to send men here to replenish supplies of food, medicine, and weaponry.

The activities of the Calamina Ranch dwellers aroused the growing curiosity of Algarañáz and his workers. Encounters

with these overly curious neighbours grew more and more frequent. Measures of precaution had to be increased, and an observation point was set up at the base camp from which all access points to the ranch house could be watched. On November 25 Che noted: "The observation point reported that a jeep arrived with two or three passengers. It turned out that it was a mobile medical unit fighting the fever in the countryside; they took blood samples and were off."

Another source of anxiety—or rather physical suffering—were the mosquitos and other insects. No one had thought of them beforehand and now Che and his comrades had to suffer the consequences of such an unforgivable oversight. The entry for November 18 reads: "Everything is proceeding monotonously: the mosquitos and garapatas<sup>1</sup> have bitten us to a point where we're covered with painful sores from their infected bites."

Che maintained a constant radio connection with "Manila" (Havana). Reinforcements, both Cuban and Bolivian, trickled into the ranch, and by November 27 their number had reached 30.

On November 30 Che, summing up the month, wrote: "Everything has gone rather well: I arrived without complications, half of the men are already here also having arrived without incident, although a number were delayed. Most of Ricardo's men are ready to join our movement whatever happens. Our prospects are not bad in this region, which is distant from any major centre and allows us as much time as we need to linger here. Our plans are to wait for the arrival of the others, bring up the number of Bolivians to at least 20 and then move into action. It remains to be seen how Monje reacts and how Guevara's men conduct themselves."

Ricardo's men were Bolivians, apparently the Peredo brothers and a few students in contact with them. Guevara's men were supporters of the mining leader Moisés Guevara Rodríguez. Monje, Mario Monje in full, was then the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Bolivia, with whom discussions were forthcoming on the CPB stance towards the proposed guerrilla movement.

December 2 marked the arrival of Chino (Juan Pablo Chang

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<sup>1</sup> Ticks, eating their way into the body and depositing larvae there, which then causes unbearable itching.

Navarro), a Peruvian revolutionary, participant in the guerrilla movement that had been crushed by the authorities. Chino offered to place 20 Peruvians at Che's disposal, men who had fought in the guerrilla movement in Peru. They discussed the question of organising a guerrilla base in Puna, on the Peruvian bank of Lake Titicaca. After the talks with Che Chino set off for La Paz, intending to go to Cuba, and from there return to Bolivia to join Che's unit.

Meanwhile the guerrillas continued their day-to-day preparations. In December they dug another cache of weapons and ammunition in the environs of Calamina.

However Algora's workers gave them no peace. Commenting on the persistent spying Che wrote on December 11: "This alters our plans, we must be very careful."

Disagreement arose among the Bolivians at Calamina. Some of them agreed to become guerrillas, others made their agreement conditional pending a decision by the Communist Party of Bolivia, whose position towards Che's unit remained unclear.

On December 12 Che made the following entry: "I talked with my group, 'reading a sermon' on the essence of armed struggle. I pointed to the necessity of discipline and unity of command.... I reported the following appointments: Joaquín—deputy for military affairs, Rolando and Inti—commissars, Alejandro—chief of staff, Pombo—liaison, Inti—finances, Nato—provisions and weapons, and Moro—medicine (temporarily)."

In the same entry Che noted the disquieting fact: "Coco returned from Caranavi with the necessary provisions, but some people saw him in Lagunillas and were surprised by the amount of his purchases."

Until December 31 the residents of Calamina were busy with routine guerrilla chores: making dugouts and shelters, setting up a radio transmitter, exploring the vicinity in depth, establishing secret paths through the jungle, pinpointing favourable positions for springing ambushes, and carrying on a variety of drills. All this often went on under a downpour and on empty stomachs. Che took part in all the work and, as usual, did not spare himself. He demanded the same from his men, which apparently did not always meet with enthusiasm even among the Cuban veterans. The diary draws attention to this fact in an entry of December 28: "In the camp I met Marcos and Miguel who had spent the night

among the rocks, since they hadn't managed to return by night-fall. They were indignant at what had been said about me in my absence. They must have had in mind Joaquín, Alejandro and the Doctor."

The long-awaited Mario Monje arrived at Calamina in the morning of December 31, just before the New Year. He was escorted by Tania, Ricardo and a Bolivian by the nickname of Pan Divino, who remained in Che's unit as a volunteer. That entire day and New Year's Eve Che and Monje carried on discussions. The negotiations were no smooth sailing. There was no question of the expediency of a guerrilla movement in Bolivia. The Communist Party came out in favour of revolutionary activity. However, no agreement was reached on a united leadership over the guerrilla movement....

The leadership of the Communist Party of Bolivia, although it bore no responsibility for the organisation of a guerrilla unit, permitted its members to enroll in the ranks and gave most decisive political support to the movement. A declaration of the CPB dated March 30, 1967 (soon after the first engagements between Che's unit and Bolivian troops) stated: "...The Communist Party of Bolivia, which has waged an unremitting struggle against the policy of betraying national interests, warned that such a policy would lead to consequences that are hard to predict. Now the Party notes that the incipient guerrilla struggle is but one of the results of this policy, one form of response to the government.

"The Communist Party, hence, declares its solidarity with the struggle of the guerrilla patriots. The most positive aspect in this context is that this struggle may reveal the best path for Bolivians to take in order to gain victory in revolution...."

Jorge Colle, who replaced Monje as the First Secretary of the CC CPB, spoke in the same vein. In a conversation with the Bolivian journalist Rubén Vásquez Díaz soon after the beginning of military operations near the Ñancahuasu, Colle declared: "Our relations with the guerrilla movement may be described as follows: solidarity and support in every way that the Party can help." At the same time Colle specified: "We didn't begin the guerrilla movement. It is not our work and we didn't organise it.... Still, we are helping the guerrillas and expressing our solidarity with them in all sincerity. We know that they are anti-imperialist revolutionaries and therefore deserve our help and respect. Our comrades in the mountains are acting in accordance with their

views and this is impressive. There are, however, many forms of struggle. We, the entire party, are preparing for guerrilla activities and an uprising, but the struggle of the masses must not be ignored....”

Let us return, then, to the Nancahuasu on January 1, 1967. Che estimated that Calamina would become one of the links in a guerrilla chain which would extend the length of the southern cone at least from Peru to Argentina. As far as Peru was concerned he had already talked this over with Chino whose return to Calamina was expected in the near future. Che was also accompanied in Calamina by his trusted companion Antonio—Captain Orlando Pantoja Tamayo—who had been Chief of Staff of the Eighth Column and been twice wounded during the Las Villas campaign. Like Rolando, he had known Bolivia since 1963 and knew the plans of the Peruvian revolutionaries to organise guerrilla operations in this ancient land of the Incas....

Che placed even higher hopes on Argentina. Despite the tragic collapse of Masetti’s unit, Che was convinced that his homeland could and must become the arena of successful guerrilla activities. Its sparsely settled mountain regions of Salta and Jujuy are contiguous with Bolivia. Heavily exploited rural labourers and land-hungry peasants lived there. They could, they must join the ranks of the guerrilla armies whose predecessors had already fought there in the previous century during the period of liberation wars against the Spanish colonisers.

In Argentina there was much “inflammable” material. With the appearance of a “guerrilla hearth” in Bolivia, people would have a new hope there, and then Che would come to their aid from the Nancahuasu. Finally Ernesto Guevara Serna would return to his homeland to fight and win.

But to realise these plans it was urgently imperative to establish contact with fighters in Argentina, who were inert after the demise of their unit. Che sent Tania to Argentina to establish contact with these men.

On January 18 Che entered in his diary: “Loro [Vásquez Machicado] arrived during a heavy rain to report that Algarrañáz had talked with Antonio and given him to understand that he knew a lot. He suggested that we pool our resources and work together on the production of cocaine or whatever we were doing. That ‘whatever’ means that this character suspects something. I instructed Loro to recruit Algarrañáz, but not to promise him that

much—just payment for the delivery of goods in his jeep. I also told Loro to threaten him with a bullet if he thought of giving us away.” However Algarañáz, judging by the facts, had already long ago established contact with the police in Camiri, who on the next day appeared at the Calamina Ranch with a search warrant. Che wrote on January 19: “Lt. Fernández accompanied by four plainclothesmen drove up in a jeep to look for a ‘narcotics factory’. They searched our house and their attention was drawn by certain objects which struck them as odd: one such curiosity was the fuel for our lamps, which we had not yet had time to haul off to the caches. They took away a pistol from Loro, but left him his rifle and small-calibre pistol. For appearances they had earlier taken away Algarañáz’ pistol, and showed their trophy to Loro. Then they went away, leaving behind them the warning that they were aware of what was going on and had better be taken into account.”

Che was already certain that Algarañáz and his men were spying on Calamina and reporting everything to the police.

There was a new alarm on the next day: “We wanted to carry out some military exercises, but couldn’t, since the old camp is in growing danger. Some gringo showed up there toting an M-2 automatic rifle, from which he fires rounds every now and then. He claims to be a ‘friend’ of Algarañáz and is planning to spend a ten-day vacation in these parts. I’ll send out a scout to choose a campsite closer to Algarañáz’ home. If everything flops and we have to leave the zone, the bastard will pay for everything.”

Although clouds thickened over the “hearth” the link with Camiri and La Paz functioned normally. New men continued to arrive at the camp. On January 21 three more Bolivians arrived, one of whom, noted Che in his diary, was an Aymara Indian peasant. January 26 marked the arrival of the mining leader Moisés Guevara and a woman, the underground worker Loyola. Moisés was a former member of the Communist Party who had swung to a pro-Maoist grouping but had then been excluded from the latter for “colluding with the Cubans”. He agreed to join the guerrilla unit with his roughly 20 supporters. Che demanded of his namesake that his men refrain from factional efforts and from “polemics on international and domestic problems”. Moisés agreed but promised to provide his volunteers only by the middle of February, for, as Che noted in his diary, “his men refuse to follow him until the carnival has ended”.

Che assigned Loyola, whose fortitude and belief in the cause had made a strong impression on him, the task of setting up underground support organisations in La Paz and other towns. These organisations were to furnish the guerrillas with military supplies, ammunition, and provisions, gather information on the enemy, practice sabotage and other subversive activities. Che handed Loyola a detailed list of "Instructions for Cadres Working in the City" and she departed for La Paz. But although such contacts were highly promising, the flow of Bolivians to the "hearth" disappointed Che's expectations, a fact which he observed with his usual honesty in his "monthly analysis" for January 1967: "Now the guerrilla stage in the literal sense of the word is beginning and we shall test our men. Time will tell our true worth and will show what prospects the Bolivian revolution has.

"Of all that we have considered beforehand, the recruiting of indigenous Bolivian combatants is proceeding the slowest."

On February 1, leaving a few men under the command of the Cuban Marcos in Calamina which had been cleared of all compromising objects (now properly hidden in the caches), Che and a unit of 20 men set off for the mountains on a training march intended to last 25 days. Inti tells us that on this march Che carried the heaviest back pack. Teaching through personal example was always his "weakness".

This march was to temper and weld the men together, test their stamina, discipline, endurance and courage. It would also allow them to scout out localities, deposit secret stores of weapons and provisions along the way and, finally, establish contact with the population. Who were they, these inhabitants whose freedom and happiness the guerrillas had come here to fight for despite all obstacles and dangers? Would these people help the guerrillas and join their ranks as had their counterparts, the *guajiros*, in the distant but so cherished Sierra Maestra? Or perhaps the local inhabitants would meet these foreigners with mistrust and turn their backs on them? Che was anxious to make contact for he foresaw the need for no little effort to overcome the barrier of alienation and suspicion with which the Bolivian Indians kept the outside world at a distance. And no wonder, for this outside world had done them little good over the centuries.

The locality the guerrillas had chosen to cross turned out to be difficult of passage, semi-arid and full of prickly underbrush and

swarming with venomous insects. They crossed swift mountain streams, rocky ridges, chasms and steep slopes. In many places they were forced to use machetes to clear their way through thickets. The maps they had turned out to be useless for they were both imprecise and inaccurate. Che's unit got lost and spent 48 days instead of the planned 25 in the wilds.

During this march the guerrillas made several contacts with the local inhabitants. The peasants talked in local Indian dialects incomprehensible to the guerrillas; they remained aloof, suspicious and often even hostile. This fact in itself was no major surprise for Che, who had written in his *Guerrilla Warfare* that when operations are initiated the peasants, fearing the repression of the authorities and captive of their own ignorance, would act just so towards these "outsiders" and only as military operations are stepped up and when the goodwill of the guerrillas has been convincingly demonstrated would the attitude of the peasants alter in favour of the insurgents. Still Che had expected a warmer response from the Bolivian peasants even at this initial reconnoitering stage of their operations. This is how Che described in his diary his first meeting with peasants during the march: "Pretending to be one of Inti's aides I talked with local residents. I think that the scene with the change of clothes was unconvincing, since Inti conducted himself too modestly.

"The peasant was very typical: he was incapable of understanding us, but at the same time in no position to foresee the danger inherent in meeting with us and so, as such he himself posed a potential threat. He told us about some of his neighbours. But we couldn't believe him for he spoke without conviction.

"The doctor treated his children....

"(The peasant's name was Rojas)."

There is an extant photo of Che sitting on a stump and holding Rojas' two children on his knees, while the peasant stands nearby. We should remember his name for we'll meet him again....

The guerrillas carried a portable wireless set with them and kept up a constant connection with "Manila".

Days passed. The unit climbed higher and higher into the mountains. They were exhausted and made irritable by the scanty rations, relentless insects, heavy back packs, whose straps viciously chafed their flesh, their worn-out shoes, bruised feet and frequent downpours. Minor incidents with growing frequency



became the source of conflict among the Cubans and also between the Cubans and Bolivians. Che tried to calm and mollify the men who had lost their self-control, but his appeals to maintain discipline did not have their former impact on these tormented marchers.

From the outset Che himself felt miserable. As early as February 4 he wrote in his diary: "I have been relieved of 15 pounds, and the going is easier. Still the pain in my shoulders from the back pack sometimes gets intolerable...."

Entry for February 12: "I'm dead tired."

Entry for February 23: "This has been a hellish day for me.... At noon we set out under a sun which seemed hot enough to melt the rocks. Soon I began to feel that I was losing my grip. This faintness occurred while we were crossing a pass. From that point on I kept going on enthusiasm alone. The highest elevation in this zone is 1,420 metres."

On February 26 a Bolivian named Benjamín fell into a river and efforts to save him were futile. Che wrote of the deceased: "He was a weak and very awkward youth, but he had a strong will to win. Our trials simply overwhelmed him. He wasn't physically prepared. So now we've had our baptism on the banks of the Rio Grande, and what a senseless baptism it was."

But still Che didn't lose his optimism. In his monthly analysis for February he noted: "Although I don't know how things are going back at the camp, [here] everything is proceeding more or less well, with the exceptions that are inevitable in such situations.

"The march is continuing quite satisfactorily, but blackened by the incident which cost Benjamín's life. The men are still weak and not all the Bolivians will hold out. The last hungry days have revealed a decline and even a sharp fall in enthusiasm....

"As far as the Cubans are concerned, the two with limited experience, namely Pacho and Rubio, are not in peak form. Alejandro is doing fine. Of the older ones Marcos is constantly causing serious difficulties and Ricardo is not above reproach either.

"The next stage must be militant and decisive."

A month had passed since the unit had left the camp. Their victuals were rapidly diminishing. They began to eat kites, parrots and horsemeat. All suffered from upset stomachs. Che gave the

order to return to the camp on the Ñancahuasu River, but it was not as simple as that. They got lost and the famished men, despite the orders, began to eat canned food from the emergency rations. On March 4 Che wrote in his diary: "The men's morale is low and their health deteriorating from day to day. I have edema of the legs."

On March 7 he added: "The men's spirits are falling rapidly as they see that supplies are almost gone and yet the end is not in sight." A week later: "We bagged four hawks. They made our meal, and despite our expectations, it wasn't bad at all. All of our gear is wet and the rain never seems to end. The mood is very dismal. Miguel's legs have swollen and some others suffer from the same too."

A day later Che allowed the men to eat a horse, since edema was already reaching dangerous levels. Che wrote: "To one degree or another Miguel, Inti, Urbano and Alejandro have all been affected by edema. I myself am very weak."

It was just at this time that an episode occurred to which Che didn't attach particular significance but which was fraught with consequence for the unit.

Early in March Marcos and several other guerrillas set out from the main camp in search of Che. Along the way they came across an oil pump and there encountered a peasant named Epifanio Vargas. Marcos passed himself off as a "Mexican engineer", asked directions and tried to buy food. Vargas found this "Mexican" suspicious and told his wife about the encounter. She in turn told her mistress—the wife of a captain, who passed it on to her husband. The captain related the information to the command of the Fourth Military District in Camiri. Vargas was arrested and forced to serve as guide for the army patrol sent out to follow Marcos. His trail led the soldiers to the base camp.

Returning, Che's group also passed near the oil pump. The guerrillas learned from local residents that a heavily armed "Mexican" had been spotted in the area, and understood that this referred to Marcos. On March 9 Che entered in his diary that Marcos had once again "distinguished himself". He was as yet unaware that Marcos' carelessness had led the soldiers directly to the gates of the guerrilla camp.

According to Che's calculations the unit should long ago have returned to its permanent post. The guerrillas had clearly gotten

lost somewhere in the immediate vicinity, but despite all their efforts they could not find their refuge on the Ñancahuasu River.

On March 17, just two days before finally returning to the camp a raft overturned while crossing the Ñancahuasu and Carlos drowned. "He was regarded," Che wrote, "as the best of the Bolivians in the rearguard in terms of seriousness, enthusiasm and discipline." Along with Carlos the river swept away 6 back packs, 6 rifles and almost their entire supply of cartridges.

The unit was now defenceless, lost and exhausted. Hunger and physical suffering, the senseless loss of two comrades, the feeling that there was no way out and that they were condemned which swept over the men after the month and a half of wandering lost along the wild trails of south-eastern Bolivia—it was no wonder many were despondent. Che noticed "grumbling" even among the seasoned Cubans. But Che, although his physical state was certainly no better and perhaps much worse than that of his comrades, could not allow himself the luxury of doubting, complaining, or expressing dissatisfaction. Doubt of what, of whom? Complaints against whom? Dissatisfaction with what? With himself? But why? This march had been a test of their stamina, resilience and determination. The war which was about to begin and to be waged against a powerful and numerous foe could only be won by soldiers who were capable of withstanding severe deprivations and prepared for the greatest sacrifices, super-heroes—revolutionaries in the true sense of the word. True, his comrades were now at the limits of their physical and moral strength, they grumbled and quarrelled, hunger had made them greedy and mosquito bites irritable, their eyes, swollen with lack of sleep and exhaustion, were grim indeed. But they continued forward, they had not lost faith in him, their leader. As earlier they were ready to strike at the jugular of imperialism and they had withstood the test quite well. Such people won't let you down!

On March 19, the 48th day, the unit approached the base camp. But it was early to be pleased. A military snoopers began to fly in circles over them. Finally in the evening the guerrillas met with El Negro, the Peruvian doctor, who was waiting for them. He broke the news to Che. Since March 5 Debray, Tania, Chino (coming from Havana), Moisés with his men and Pelado—the Argentine Ciro Roberto Bustos—had been at the base camp.

This, of course, was good to hear, but the bad news was more weighty. Calamina had been discovered by the Bolivian authorities. Two of Moisés Guevara's men, Vicente Rocabado and Pastor Barrera, had deserted and evidently talked to the authorities in Camiri, if they hadn't been beaten to this by Algañáz. Soldiers had appeared in the vicinity of the base camp (these were the same ones following Marcos' tracks). On March 17 yet another of Moisés' volunteers—one Salucho—fell into their hands. Then the police had raided the ranch, turned it upside down, and apparently found proof that the guerrillas had been there—either political literature or other evidence, despite the fact that Che had given strict orders to clean the place up. The police raid had taken place three days earlier. Since the time a police column 60 strong had been spotted near the base camp, combing the area. At any moment the soldiers might stumble upon the base camp and open fire.

Such a prospect, given Che's absence, created anxiety if not panic among the inhabitants of the base camp—then some 30 men. On March 20 Che entered in his diary: "A completely pessimistic atmosphere prevails here.... Events have created a feeling of terrible chaos. The men just don't know what to do."

Apprised of the situation, Che began to institute order. He arranged outposts, restored discipline and began to prepare his men for a march, for it was dangerous to remain in the base camp. Now that its existence was known to the authorities it had turned into a trap.

Che's arrival improved spirits but many, especially the novices, continued to be confused, if not afraid, in the face of the onrush of threatening events.

March 21 and 22 were spent in preparations and Che's discussions with the Peruvian Chino, Argentine Pelado, Debray and Tania. On his return from Cuba Chino was brimming with hope for the organisation of guerrilla activities in Peru. Che wrote that "he intends to begin with a group of 15 men, and he will take charge of the Ayacucho zone. We also agreed that in the near future I will take five men from him, and later another 15. Then they will return to him after they have gained some experience in battle.... Chino seems to be quite enthusiastic."

No less promising were the conversations with Pelado, who, as Che wrote, was ready to put himself at Che's disposal. Pelado

agreed to head a group of Che's supporters in Argentina, who at the suggestion of Che were to begin their activities in the country's north.

Debray also received instructions. At first he announced his intention of remaining with the unit, presumably as its chronicler, but when Che said that he would be more useful organising support for the guerrillas in France he readily agreed, confessing that his dearest wish was "to marry and have a child". You can imagine the ironic smile on Che's lips when he transcribed this in his diary. Certainly even a wise man sometimes stumbles, and it is only a short distance from the sublime to the ridiculous. But we won't be too severe with the young French anthropologist, for he also would have to drink his bitter cup....

For the time being one thing was clear. They had to make all due haste in leaving the base camp, where at any moment they could be surrounded by government troops. They just had to hope that if the troops did arrive they would not stumble across the caches. Now the success of the guerrillas would depend upon their manoeuvrability. They had to vanish, evaporate for a time, turn into nomadic phantoms, invisible guerrillas. If they were to surface again, it could only be where they were least expected. Che had a perfect knowledge of the techniques of guerrilla warfare and was convinced that he could manage to outwit the ignorant Bolivian generals who were expert only at waging war against defenceless people.

Meanwhile nerves were jangled in the unit, quarrels became more frequent among the soldiers and certain of them declined to carry out Che's orders. Che's diary entry of March 22 ruthlessly pinpoints these phenomena: "Inti came to complain of rudeness on the part of Marcos. I blew up and told Marcos that if it were true he would be kicked out of the unit. He replied that he would rather be shot...."

"In the evening the scouts returned [not fulfilling their mission] and I gave them a good tongue thrashing. Olo reacted heatedly and said that he was resigning from all functions in the unit. The meeting was stormy and explosive and ended on a bad note."

But here the commander said all that was necessary to his overwrought and exhausted troops. The unit, in all with novices and guests 47 men, was brought together and it was time to act.

## And Again the Thunder of Battle

Silence, orators!  
Yours is the floor,  
Comrade Mauser!  
V. Mayakovsky

I am a son of America; I owe  
her everything. America is the  
homeland to the development,  
renewal and rapid strengthening  
of which I dedicate my life. A  
bitter cup is not for tender lips.  
And a viper will not bite the chest  
of a brave man.

José Martí

On March 20 Loro shot a soldier near Calamina. This agitated the military and they decided to comb the area in search of the guerrillas. On March 23 the same army patrol which had been on the tracks of Marcos fell into an ambush set up by Rolando. A few volleys from the guerrillas and the patrol existed only in name. The results of this first engagement with the troops exceeded the guerrillas' wildest hopes. Seven killed, including Vargas (ending his career as a traitor), and fourteen taken prisoner, including seven wounded who were given immediate medical attention by the guerrillas' doctors. A major and a captain turned up among the prisoners.

The war booty would have made the head of any guerrilla spin: 16 Mauser rifles with two thousand cartridges, 3 mortars with 64 rockets, 2 bazookas, 3 submachine guns, each with 2 drums, and a c. .30 machine gun with two cartridge belts. Che instructed that the prisoners be given political indoctrination and then released. The behaviour of the captured officers was noteworthy, Che wrote in his diary. They told everything they knew, just like parrots. The major was encouraged to join the ranks of the guerrillas; he refused but promised to resign from the army. The captain turned out to be almost a sympathiser. He swore that he had joined the army by order of comrades from the Communist Party and that one of his brothers was studying in Cuba. Moreover, he provided the names of two other officers who were ready to cooperate with the guerrillas. The prisoners also turned over the plans for operations according to which the army was to

advance along both sides of the Nancahuasu and then close in a pincers on the guerrilla camp.

So it would seem that the first clash with government troops brought victory for the guerrillas, but it also further complicated the situation for them. The encounter signalled the beginning of a war for which the guerrillas were not yet adequately prepared. Che, according to the testimony of his companions, counted on holding on in the Nancahuasu area until the end of 1967 and only then beginning military operations. By that time, according to his calculations, guerrilla bases would already be in operation in Peru and northern Argentina. Now the organisers of these bases were in his own ranks and there remained little hope that they could make their way out safe and sound.

In addition, the first shots and first blood drawn had frightened certain of the politically dubious volunteers from Moisés Guevara's group. Their cowardice made Che livid with rage. On March 24 he entered in his diary: "Nato and Coco left with the newly arrived rabble for the upper camp but halfway there turned back because the riff-raff didn't want to go any farther. We'll have to get rid of them." The next day Che stripped four of the Bolivians of the rank of guerrilla, confiscated their personal belongings, cut off their supply of tobacco and threatened to stop feeding them for their refusal to carry out orders.

But still, what a striking beginning if we take the first days in the Sierra Maestra for comparison! Then the guerrillas had been smashed, they had lost nearly 60 men killed, wounded and fleeing from the scene of battle, and had been deprived of virtually all their weapons. Here they inflicted a decisive defeat upon the enemy in the very first engagement. Che had more than 35 well-armed soldiers. After Alegría de Pío Fidel could only muster 12 men. So, it was a propitious beginning.

Now they had to await a response from the army, and it was not long in coming. Immediately after the encounter the bombing of the camp began and, in Che's words, "caused great commotion in the camp". Helicopters also appeared above them.

A meeting of the guerrillas was called on March 25, and there it was decided to name the unit the Army of National Liberation of Bolivia, and to distribute a war communiqué among the population.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Che wrote four summaries of the guerrilla military operations as well as a manifesto of the Army of National Liberation, addressed to the Bolivian

It was only on March 27 that the radio carried the sensational news of the encounter with the guerrillas in the Nancagua region. The government, trying to "save face", averred that the guerrillas had lost in combat "one more dead" than they themselves, that the opponent had shot the wounded, and that government soldiers had taken four of them prisoner, of whom two were foreigners. However, something else followed from these government reports: namely, that the authorities were well informed of the composition of the unit, that deserters and prisoners had given the police much information, and that Tania's activities were no longer a secret.

Che wrote in his diary: "Judging by everything, Tania's role has now been established. So two years of solid and patient work have been lost. Now it will be very difficult for our guests to leave here. I got the impression that such a turn of affairs by no means pleased Danton (Debray) when he learned of it."

A few days passed relatively calmly, except for the radio screaming out horrors. The army, which was evidently mustering its forces, made no effort to give battle.

In the unit violations of discipline and conflicts between the Bolivians and Cubans continued. On March 29 Che complained in his diary that "recently my orders have often been violated". On March 31 Che had another unpleasant conversation with the Bolivian Loro, who waxed eloquent on the subject of the "full dissolution of the guerrilla movement". On the same day the government troops again took to the offensive; they brought the empty ranch under mortar attack and aerial bombardment, then moved in to seize Calamina.

Writing his review of March, Che said: "The month was packed with events. The following panorama can be set forth: Now the unit is passing through a stage of consolidation and self-cleansing, which is being carried out ruthlessly. The size of the group is slowly growing both through the trickle of men arriving from Cuba (who don't look bad at all) and through Moisés Guevara's men, whose level of morale is very low (two desertions, one taken prisoner and squealing everything, three cowards and two weaklings). Now the combat stage has arrived, marked by our precisely delivered blow, which caused a sensation but was also

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people, and a message to the Bolivian miners. Of these documents only one war summary surfaced in the Bolivian press. The rest fell into the hands of the authorities and their content was revealed only after Che's death.



accompanied both before and after by crude mistakes (Marcos' escapades and Braulio's indecisiveness). A counterattack by the enemy has begun and to this point is typified by: a) a tendency to occupy key points in order to isolate us; b) a propaganda campaign conducted both domestically and internationally; c) the absence to this time of military activity by the army; d) the mobilisation of the peasantry against us.

"It is clear that we must move out earlier than I had counted on, and leaving behind a group which will be in constant danger. Moreover, it is possible that four more men will betray us. The situation is not very good."

Che was extremely irked by the presence of Debray and the Argentine Bustos in the unit. Neither was suitable for guerrilla life and neither concealed his desire to "gain freedom" as soon as possible. But it was no easy task providing them with safe passage. Che hoped to swoop down on the locality of Gutiérrez and get hold of a jeep there in which they could send off both visitors along the highway to Santa Cruz.

But on the way to Gutiérrez the guerrillas ran into army patrols sent into this district by the authorities, who had gained detailed information on their movements from the peasants. This forced Che to give up the intended plan and to turn back in the direction of the base camp. On April 3 Che gave Debray and Bustos three alternatives: remain in the unit, leave it immediately at their own risk or wait for a more favourable moment to do the same. The guests chose the third variant. But before they could realise it two more encounters with government troops took place, ending, like the first one, in decisive victories for the guerrillas. Both engagements took place on April 10. As previously, two armed columns fell into ambushes set up by the guerrillas. The results of the first battle were three soldiers killed, several wounded and six, including the non-commissioned officer in command of the column, taken prisoner. The second ended no less successfully: enemy losses amounted to 7 dead, 5 wounded and 24 taken prisoner. All in all 10 killed and 30 taken prisoner, among the latter Major Rubén Sánchez and several non-commissioned officers. Such victorious tallies were a rare event even in the Sierra Maestra. The victories were clouded by the death of the Cuban Rubio (Captain Jesús Suárez Gayol) who took a bullet in the head during the first clash. The prisoners, including Major Rubén Sánchez, were again released after holding political discussions.

However, the news broadcast over the radio was less propitious. A government broadcast announced that a snapshot of Che, beardless and with pipe in mouth, had been discovered in the insurgent camp, and that one of their caches had been located.

Che's persistent efforts to bring together the Bolivians and the Cubans did not have the desired result, despite the victories now to their credit. On April 12 Che wrote: "At half past six in the morning I gathered all the men (except the four weak ones) to honour the memory of Rubio and underscore that the first blood shed was Cuban. This was necessary since among the men of this advance guard a tendency of treating the Cubans disparagingly could be observed. This was demonstrated yesterday when Camba declared that he trusted the Cubans less and less.... I again appealed for unity as the only way of increasing our group, which had already boosted its firepower and been baptised in battle, but numerically has actually diminished rather than increased in recent days."

On April 15 they received a coded message from "Manila" stating that Juan Lechin was in Havana, that he knew of Che's whereabouts, had promised to make a public declaration of support and counted on illegally returning to Bolivia in 20 days to work with the guerrillas.

The unit continued to manoeuvre about in the Nancahuasu region remaining within reach of their secret caches and underground food deposits. Meanwhile their staple food was horse-meat. On April 16 Tania and Alejandro came down with temperatures of 39 °C (102.2 ° F). Moisés also fell ill. Given the circumstances, on April 17, Che decided to leave 13 of his group in the zone under the command of Joaquín. Among these 13 were the four Bolivians who had been stripped of the title of guerrilla, and also Alejandro and Tania. "I instructed Joaquín to carry out a minor military operation in the vicinity in order to distract attention from the main group, then to await our arrival within three days. The rest of the time he was to remain in the zone but to avoid direct clashes and to wait for our return."

Che was forced to make this step. In order to give Debray and Bustos an opportunity to leave he had to hasten his own departure from the Nancahuasu region where the guerrillas were threatened with an encirclement. Joaquín and Che did not meet again....

Although military activities had now continued for about a month and as a rule with results favourable for the guerrillas, still the peasants generally declined to cooperate with them. Che could not but take note of this, the more so that for him peasant support was the decisive factor in a war of manoeuvre. On the same day, April 17, he entered in his diary: "Of all the peasants whom we have met only one, Simón, 'agreed to help us, but even he was clearly frightened."

At the time of this entry Havana radio was transmitting his message to the Afro-Asian-Latin American Peoples Solidarity Organisation. Here Che with his customary passion advocated the creation of centres of struggle in Latin America, intended to draw the fire of imperialism. If the USA could not cope with one Vietnam, it was even less capable of dealing with two or three—such was Che's logic. He predicted an extended period of bloody armed struggle with imperialism and appealed to revolutionaries to give up factional conflict and come together in a united front to struggle against their common enemy.

The message ended with the words: "Our every step is a militant call to struggle against imperialism and a battle song in honour of popular unity against the supreme enemy of mankind—the United States of America. If death suddenly overcomes us, we shall greet it with the hope that our militant cry will be heard, that other hands will seize our weapons and other people take up the song to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire and militant summons to war and victory."

Seven snapshots of Che showing him with his new look and with a half-grown beard in the guerrilla camp were now made public along with the document. These snapshots were evidently brought to Cuba by Chino. Later, Che wrote in his monthly summary: "After the publication in Havana of my message it's unlikely that any doubt remains of my precise whereabouts."

On April 19 the guerrillas captured an Englishman named George Roth who was passing off himself as either a journalist or cameraman. Roth may well have been a CIA agent, in any case he had already worked as a Peace Corps instructor in Puerto Rico. He stated that he had arrived in Bolivia from Chile allegedly to write a sensational piece on the guerrillas and in so doing make a profit. Bolivian officers had shown him Braulio's diary found in one of the guerrilla hideouts, in which Braulio related

how on November 20, 1966, he left Havana and through Moscow, Prague, and Buenos Aires arrived in La Paz. This report irked Che. He noted: "It's the usual story. It seems that the prevalent feature among our men has become lack of discipline and responsibility." Since in Braulio's diary Che figures under the sobriquet of Ramón, now he changed his name to Fernando. Debray clutched at Roth like a drowning man at a piece of straw. He suggested that Che promise the Englishman material on the guerrillas with the condition that Roth help Debray and Bustos escape from the encirclement. Bustos, wrote Che, "reluctantly agreed with this variant, and I washed my hands of the matter". On the same day Roth, Debray and Bustos left the unit.

A day later Che heard on the radio that all three had been detained by the Bolivian authorities. Their arrest was a serious blow for Che, who wrote in his diary: "Danton and Carlos [Bustos] were victims of their own haste, of an almost desperate desire to escape, and also of my insufficient resistance to their plans. The result is that we have lost contact with Cuba (through Danton), and our plan of struggle in Argentina (Carlos) has collapsed."

During the next ten days Che's unit moved farther and farther north of their previous position. As the unit passed through villages the local population met the guerrillas with fear and distrust. Rolando, Che's liaison during the campaign in Las Villas, died in a clash with government soldiers. Che had been very attached to him, and wrote in his diary: "Concerning Rolando's death in these gloomy circumstances I can only say, if in the future someone manages to read these words: 'You were a small but intrepid soldier. But with your death you became great and eternal like steel'." At this time Loro also straggled from the unit. The ranks were slowly but inexorably thinning, and there was no hope of gaining reinforcements. Not one of the local inhabitants in the villages they passed through joined them. Neither did a single worker from the nearby oil fields belonging to the Americans. The guerrillas spoke in the settlements making inflammatory appeals for an uprising against imperialism, but it was clear that they did not enjoy the trust of the population. Still Che was convinced that this was a temporary phenomenon.

The monthly summary for April, although mentioning and soberly appraising the guerrillas' mistakes and oversights, is on

the whole still suffused with optimism. The most noteworthy passages in this analysis are the following:

"Things are proceeding more or less normally, although we have suffered the death of two of our men: Rubio and Rolando. The loss of the latter was a particularly severe blow for us, since I was planning to place him in command of a unit active on its own. We have had four more engagements. Each of them ended favourably, and one particularly well—and this was the ambush in which Rubio was killed.

"On the other hand, we remain completely isolated. Sickness has undermined the health of some of the men and forced us to divide our forces, which in turn has deprived us of many opportunities. We still haven't succeeded in establishing contact with Joaquín's group. We aren't getting any support from the peasants, although it seems that with the aid of premeditated terror we succeeded in neutralising the most hostile among them. With time they will come to support us.... We haven't received a single reinforcement, and in addition to our two deaths we lost Loro....

"In sum: this was a month in which everything developed within normal limits, if the element of chance inevitable in guerrilla warfare is taken into consideration. The morale is high of all those men who successfully passed the preliminary test as guerrilla fighters."

In May the unit continued to move along the route mapped during their first march, where caches of provisions and other things were deposited along the way. However, the poor quality and lack of bulk in their diet and particularly the absence of water in this area, compounded by fatigue and nervous tension—all this took its toll on the physical condition of the guerrillas, including Che. Almost everyone suffered from stomach disorders and many had fevers. Che's condition can be deducted from his diary.

The entry for May 9 reads: "I felt that I was about to pass out and slept for about two hours so I could then continue marching at a slow and shuffling pace." And for May 13: "I felt very bad, but didn't vomit...." Three days later Che again complained of sharp pains in the stomach, vomiting and diarrhea. Still, despite his condition Che not only continued to keep up his diary but also marked in it the birthdays of his children and close relatives.

Two new encounters with troops which took place in May, also ended in victory for the guerrillas. On May 8, 27 soldiers were caught in an ambush. Shooting broke out and when the smoke cleared there were three killed, two soldiers and a junior lieutenant, and ten taken prisoner, among them two wounded. The wounded were treated and all the prisoners were released. A diary was found on the body of Lieutenant Laredo, in which he called his soldiers cowards and the workers idlers and parasites. Laredo also had with him a letter from his wife asking him to send her and a friend each a "guerrilla scalp" to brighten up their living rooms. The class enemy is everywhere of the same mentality, be it a nazi, using the skins of his victims for lampshades, or an American imperialist, collecting the ears of the Vietnamese patriots, or a Bolivian ranger, dreaming of presenting his señora the scalp of a guerrilla.

Che, says Inti, took Laredo's diary and letter and kept them in his back pack together with his own diary....

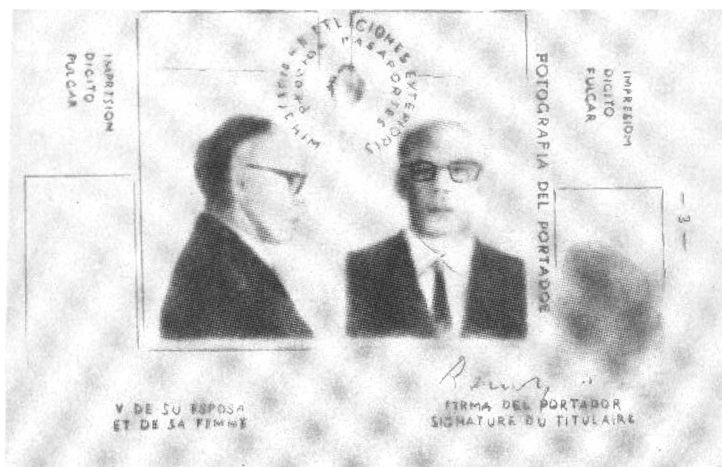
On May 30 in another clash between guerrillas and soldiers the latter had casualties of 3 dead and 1 wounded. The guerrillas suffered no losses.

During this campaign the guerrillas entered two large settlements: Pirirenda and Caraguatarenda, where they mixed with the inhabitants, acquainted them with their programme and intentions and appealed for volunteers to join the guerrilla ranks. But the Bolivians were either frightened or uncomprehending or were under the influence of government propaganda, which described Che's companions as foreign invaders, plunderers and rapists. Whatever the case, the local residents manifested clear distrust of the guerrillas. The peasants, to be sure, showed more warmth, but still refused to join their ranks.

Another thing bothering Che was the absence of any trace of Joaquín's unit, which seemed to have vanished in thin air. Che thought that perhaps Joaquín had lost his way. The guerrillas had also lost all contact with La Paz and there seemed to be no immediate hope of restoring it. Moreover, on May 16 Che received a coded message from "Manila" which only confirmed, in Che's words, "the complete isolation in which we find ourselves". This could only mean that the underground support apparatus active in La Paz collapsed after Tania's failure. Time would be needed to set up a new organisation....



Che's new look. Before departing from Cuba



Ramón Benítez, businessman



First photograph in Bolivia. November 1966

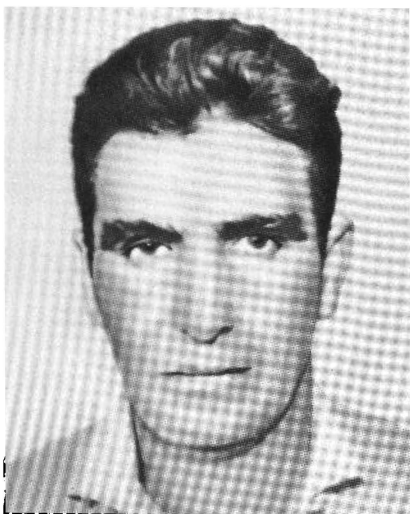




A soldier again

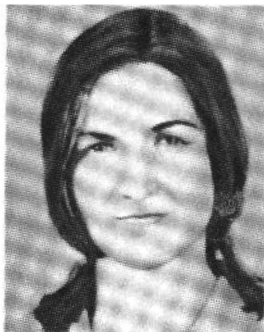


At Nancahuasu, Che is in the centre, and Inti at the far left



Inti

The many faces of Tania



Before the march. Tania is on the left



In the Bolivian Mountains. With the children of the peasant Rojas



On sentry duty

## **RECOMPENSA**

**Se ofrece la suma de 50.000.-  
Pesos bolivianos (Cincuenta millo-  
nes de bolivianos), a quién entre-  
gue vivo o muerto, (Preferible-  
mente vivo), al guerrillero Ernesto  
"Che" Guevara, de quién se sabe  
con certeza de que se encuentra  
en territorio boliviano.**

Bulletin of the Ministry  
of Internal Affairs of  
Bolivia, promising a re-  
ward for bringing in  
Che "alive or dead"



The ranger unit under  
Captain Gary Prado

CIA agent Major  
Ralph Shelton (on  
the right) 'at work



American agents  
in Higuera on the  
day of Che's murder







Rangers at Nancahuasu



# A mis hijos

Queridos Vilibita, Helidita, Camilo, Clara  
y Gerardo:

En alguna vez tienen que  
leer esta carta, una por una y  
entre ellos.

Con los años me voy olvidando de cosas y  
los más chiquitos se van olvidando más.

En padre la vida son cosas  
que se van como puentes y, sobre la  
vida real a sus conversaciones.

Quiero como buenos señores  
científicos estudiar mucho para poder do-  
minar la técnica que permite domi-  
nar la naturaleza. Quiero decir que  
la revolución es la importante y que  
cada uno de nosotros, solo, no puede  
hacerla.

En la vida, con siempre después  
de haber en la vida todos cualquier in-  
justicia cometida contra cualquier  
en cualquier parte del mundo: en la  
condición más buena de una revo-  
lución viva.

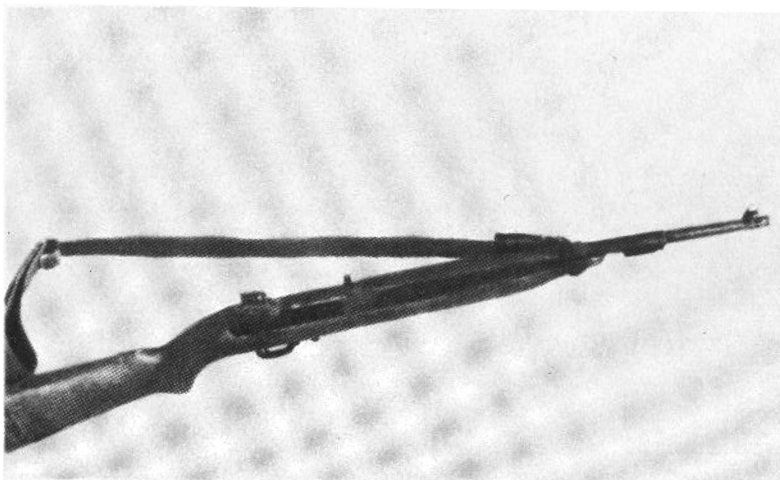
Hasta siempre. Hasta siempre a todos  
teóricos. Una buena familia y un gran  
amor de

Papa

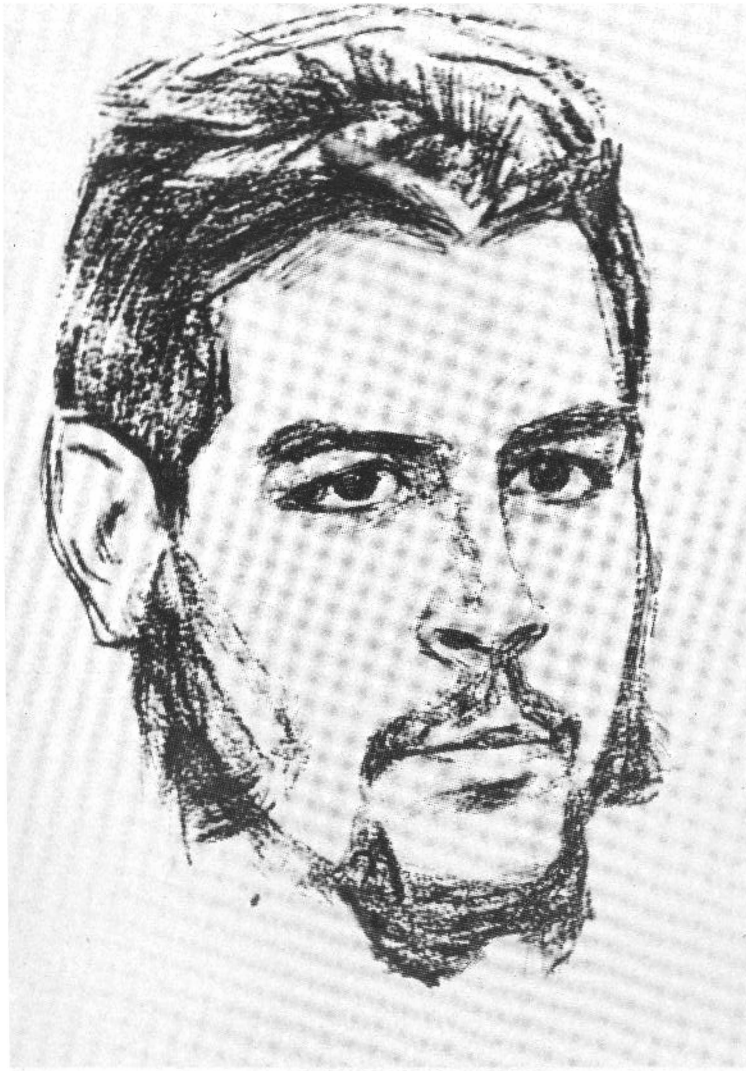




His hands remain in Cuba



His last rifle



Ernesto Che Guevara. Drawing by the Soviet artist V. Ivanov. Havana, 1961



The monument to Che erected in Santiago, Chile



*he*

No news was forthcoming from Juan Lechín or the other political leaders who had promised to support the guerrillas.

In June, Che's unit continued to operate in the same zone between Santa Cruz and Camiri, keeping within reach of their caches and still hoping to join with Joaquín's group. On Che's birthday, June 14, he wrote in his diary: "It's my thirty-ninth birthday, the years are slipping by inexorably and I wonder how much longer I have as a guerrilla. But for the time being I'm still in shape."

Certainly he was in his "best shape" at the time. He was eaten alive by insects, asthma was choking him and his stomach tormenting him. But the will of a convinced revolutionary held together this debilitated and exhausted body and suppressed the slightest complaint or external manifestation of weakness. His mind was clear and sober, proof of this being the pages of his diary where he pinpoints with lucidity and striking impartiality the pros and cons, the opportunities and prospects for the struggle the banner of which he raised and still hoped to carry it throughout the valleys and plateaus of his native Latin America. With indomitable passion and courage he led his small detachment forward, prompting surprise and an almost superstitious attachment among his men.

It was not only his companions who held him in boundless respect. The peasants and inhabitants of the settlements through which they passed gazed at the commander—this bearded, pale foreigner dressed in rags, who played with their children and treated their teeth, this Fernando Sacamuelas (the Teeth-Puller) as the peasants called him, as a prophet of sorts. And yet, an invisible wall still seemed to separate him from these Bolivian Indians for whose happiness he and his companions had come to fight and die or win.

"The peasants," Che wrote in his June summary, "are still failing to join us. We're being caught in a vicious circle: in order to collect new recruits we have to be constantly active in a more populated region, but to do this we need more men...."

"From the military point of view the army is operating ineffectively, but it is conducting work among the peasantry which we must not underestimate, since with the help of intimidation or lies concerning our goals they are recruiting informers among the local inhabitants."

"We have to hunt down the local residents to be able to talk with them, they are like little animals," he wrote on June 19. Still, among the peasants from time to time there were those who were willing to cooperate with the guerrillas. There was, for instance, Paulino, a young tubercular peasant whom Che met in a village on July 20 and who was able to expose the police spies masquerading as pig salesmen. "This was our first recruit," Inti wrote of him. He could have added that he was their last one as well. Che instructed Paulino to make his way to Cochabamba, meet with Inti's wife and pass on a message for "Manila", since by that time their transmitter was on the blink. Now they were only capable of receiving transmissions from "Manila". Che also sent out with Paulino four summaries of the unit's military operations. Paulino tried to carry out his order but he never made it to Cochabamba. He was arrested along the way and Che's messages were seized....

On July 26, Pombo was wounded and the Cuban Tuma killed in an exchange of fire with the soldiers. Che had regarded the modest and courageous Tuma as a son and took his death hard. The enemy was also hit: 4 dead and 3 wounded. But for the latter losses were easily replaceable, while each guerrilla lost, as Che wrote in his diary, was a serious defeat for their unit, although the army was not aware of the fact.

Che closely followed the government radio broadcasts which, citing testimony by Debray, asserted that among the guerrillas were experienced Vietnamese commanders who once had "crushed the best American regiments". You get the impression, Che wrote in his diary, that Debray had talked a bit too much.

On July 30 "Manila" reported to Che that there was as yet no hope of developing a guerrilla movement in Peru, although an organisation had been created there. Che entered this report in his diary without comment.

In July the unit's situation actually deteriorated, even though the clashes with government troops still resulted in victory for the guerrillas. But guerrilla losses palpably hurt them. Two men were killed: the Cuban Ricardo, who had fought in the Sierra Maestra and the Congo (as Che mentioned in his diary), and the Bolivian Raúl. Two other guerrillas had been wounded and could not move about of their own power. Che himself could not shake off a persistent bout of asthma and had run out of his all-important



medicine. To make matters worse, in one engagement they lost 11 back packs filled with medicine as well as binoculars and, what was most important, a tape recorder on which they had transcribed the coded messages from "Manila". Now even the one-way link-up with Havana had been virtually cut off. Their sole source of information now were the ordinary news broadcasts over the radio, but they were inconsistent and contradictory. The Bolivian radio devoted more attention to the upcoming trial of Debray and Bustos. Che was very critical of their conduct after the arrest. On July 10 he wrote in his diary that "Debray and Pelado made some bad statements; above all they reported that the guerrillas have continental plans, which they should not have said".

In his résumé for July Che wrote:

"The same negative factors that were noted during the previous month were active in July, namely the inability to establish contact with Joaquín and our friends as well as losses in our ranks....

"The salient features are as follows:

"1. The continuing complete absence of contacts. 2. As before, the peasants are declining to join our unit, although there are some encouraging signs, our old acquaintances among them are greeting us warmly. 3. The guerrilla legend spreads throughout the continent.... 4. The attempt to establish contact through Paulino suffered defeat. 5. The morale and fighting spirit of the guerrillas is growing with every engagement. Camba and Chapaco look weak. 6. The army is operating ineptly, but some of its units have become stauncher. 7. The Government [of Bolivia] is suffering a worsening political crisis, but the United States is offering small loans which from a Bolivian perspective are quite significant. This helps to curb dissatisfaction.

"Our most important tasks are to re-establish contacts, recruit new volunteers and obtain medicine."

In August the situation was further complicated by attacks of asthma which put Che completely out of commission. The only way of stopping these fits was to procure some medicine, but it was not available in the nearby settlements. On August 7 Che wrote: "Today marks the ninth month since the formation of the guerrilla unit. Of the six original guerrillas 2 are dead, 2 wounded, 1 disappeared, and I, the last, am suffering from an asthma which I can't shake off."

On August 8 the unit was as usual moving through a mountainous region. Che was riding a mare which from exhaustion and hunger barely managed to keep going. He felt wretched, his asthma was suffocating him and a swollen foot ached murderously. He relentlessly urged on the mare, trying to keep it moving forward. The mare did not obey and he snatched up a knife and gouged a deep wound in its neck. Recovering his wits he gathered his companions and told them: "We're in a difficult situation. I've become a shadow of a human. The episode with the mare demonstrates that there are moments when I lose control over my actions. Other comrades aren't acting any better. The time has come for some momentous decisions. The struggle which we are waging in trying circumstances is giving us the chance to pass the test as revolutionaries, and each of us can become a man of this highest quality. But in order to do this we must surmount ourselves. Whoever feels capable should remain but those who don't feel up to it—let them leave."

Che noted in his diary: "All the Cubans and some of the Bolivians are in favour of continuing the struggle to the end."

Che mustered his strength for a desperate measure: returning to the old camp and one of the caches where a radio receiver and some anti-asthma medicine were stored. He sent eight men ahead and he slowly followed with the remainder. He still had hopes of finding Joaquín's group or at least learning what had happened to it.

The dejected guerrillas stumbled back towards the camp, avoiding settlements. They were losing the battle to hunger. The Bolivian Chapaco was showing signs of insanity. Che had an abscess on his heel and a temperature. His companions lanced the abscess and tried to relieve the sufferings of their commander, but he continued to feel miserable, and noted so in his diary.

It was just at this time that in their distant Havana a conference was held with the participation of nearly all Latin American countries, including Bolivia, and of observers from countries on other continents. The conference established the Latin American Solidarity Organisation (OLAS) and approved the promotion of guerrilla warfare in this area. Over the rostrum in the hall where the conference was held there hung an enormous picture of Che. In a manner of speaking it was he who chaired this gathering.

The conference adopted a "Congratulatory Message to Major Che Guevara" which fully approved his statement urging the creation of many Vietnams and forecast the emergence of new guerrilla centres in Latin America, turning the area into the "graveyard of US imperialism".

At the suggestion of a number of delegates the presidium of the conference announced the symbolic creation of "a Latin American nationality" and declared Major Ernesto Che Guevara "an honorary citizen of our common homeland—Latin America".

The OLAS Conference also adopted a resolution of solidarity with the guerrilla movement in Bolivia. However, essentially this resolution differed neither in scale nor in content from other such resolutions of solidarity with guerrilla movements in Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela. This may have been out of conspiratorial considerations, although by this time Che's presence in Bolivia was an open secret.

The Havana Conference of the OLAS was packed with dramatic moments. Four CIA agents spoke to the assembled delegates and provided details on how they had been instructed by US intelligence service to assassinate Fidel Castro. This testimony served as still further evidence of the criminal interference of the USA in the internal affairs of Cuba. In fact, since 1959 the US had sent scores of such subversives and assassins to Cuba.

Along with Havana radio the OLAS Conference was given wide coverage by radio stations throughout Latin America. Washington raged and stormed against the participants in the conference. The OAS announced that it would convene its own conference to adopt counter-measures against revolutionary Cuba. Barrientos called for intervention against Cuba. The radio waves were full of declarations and reports concerning the Havana Conference....

Che tried to make all possible haste to the promised hideout, where they would find life-saving medicine and foodstuffs. But by the time they approached their destination it turned out that the enemy had got there first.

"It was a black day," Che entered in his diary on August 14. "We proceeded on as usual, but at nighttime we heard on the news that the army had discovered the hideout towards which we were heading. From the details communicated there could be no

doubting the veracity of the report. Now I am condemned to suffer from my asthma for an indeterminate time. The radio also broadcast that a variety of documents and photographs had been discovered. We have been dealt a heavy blow. Who betrayed us? Who? For the time being it remains a secret."

On the next day the radio reported that the army had discovered four more caches in the region of the central camp. Now all the guerrilla's supplies were in the hands of the enemy.

Cut off from the entire world—from "Manila", from Joaquín, from their Bolivian associates, surrounded by a hostile population, driven into a half-wild region where sources of water were extremely scarce, as were wildlife which could have helped diminish their hunger, deprived of the food and medicine deposited in their secret caches, which could have given them a breathing spell to hope for a fortunate turn of events, the guerrillas continued to wander about the jungle. Che's diary is an accurate and merciless mirror reflecting the thorny path followed by the guerrilla unit condemned to death.

"Everything turned out miserable," begins the entry for August 26. On the same day he lost control and in a fit of rage struck Antonio, who had forgotten to carry out some order.

"The day passed in desperate search for avenues of escape, and the results are still unclear," begins the chronicle of the next day.

"An overcast and somewhat tormenting day," he begins on August 28.

"A difficult and truly tormenting day," wrote Che on August 29. The men were languishing from an intolerable thirst.

The entry for August 30 reads: "The situation has become intolerable: men fainted, Miguel and Darío drank urine, as did Chino with deplorable effects—stomach disorders and colics. Urbano, Benigno and Júlio descended to the bottom of a ravine and found water there. They told me that mules couldn't make it down, and I decided to remain with Nato, but Inti brought us water, and the three of us remained to eat horse-meat [from the same mare which Che wounded]. The radio transmitter remained in the ravine and we couldn't hear the news."

This month was also the least successful in terms of military operations. In the sole engagement with the enemy the guerrillas only succeeded in wounding one soldier.

With the month coming to an end Che drew up a summary and evaluated the situation, as always with remarkable acumen and truthfulness:

"This was undoubtedly the most difficult month since the time that we began our military operations. The army discovered all our secret caches, dealing us a heavy blow, particularly in psychological terms. The loss of two men and the subsequent difficult period when we fed only on horsemeat demoralised the men: It got so bad that Camba asked to leave the unit.... The lack of contact with Joaquín and the fact that prisoners from his ranks told everything they knew to the army also had a demoralising effect on the men. My illness has spread additional uneasiness among the ranks and all of this had an effect on our only engagement, in which we could have inflicted heavy losses on the enemy but in fact wounded only one soldier. On the other hand, the difficult passes through the mountains without water brought out some undesirable traits among the men.

"These are the most important elements of the situation:

"1. As earlier, we are lacking in any contacts and have no hope of establishing them in the near future.

"2. As before the peasants are refusing to join us—this is natural given the fact that recently we have rarely met them.

"3. A decline in morale can be seen in the ranks, but I hope that is temporary.

"4. The army is not operating any more effectively or energetically.

"We are living through a period of decline in combat spirit. The guerrilla legend is too somewhat dimmed. The most important tasks remain the same as a month ago: restoring contacts, expanding our ranks with new recruits and finding medicine and foodstuffs.

"It should be added that Inti and Coco are giving more and more evidence of being firm and militant revolutionary leaders."

As Che was writing these lines, a few dozen kilometres from his unit and not far from the main camp Joaquín and his men encircled by Bolivian soldiers on the Rio Grande were fighting their last battle to the death.

After Che had separated from them, Joaquín and his men circulated in the vicinity of the main camp waiting for their commander's return. Their situation was not an easy one. Of their

numbers four were ill, including Tania and Moisés Guevara. Of course, there were three doctors—the Cuban Marcos, Peruvian El Negro and Bolivian Ernesto, but there was no medicine and they could do little to relieve their patients. The Bolivian Serapio was also in tough straits. He limped and constantly lagged behind the group. Another problem was posed by the four Bolivians Paco, Pepe, Chingolo and Eusebio, whom Che had stripped of rank because of their cowardice and who had to be watched constantly, for their desertion would have allowed the enemy to gain valuable information about the unit.

Sensing that Joaquín's group was numerically smaller than that of Che, the Bolivian authorities decided to deal with the former first. A plan of encirclement and liquidation was worked out and named Cynthia—after the daughter of General Barrientos. Besides the troops under the command of colonels Luis Roque Terán and Joaquín Zenteno Anaya, Joaquín's group was pursued by troops of the Fourth and Eighth divisions and by aviation which kept the guerrillas under constant surveillance and air attack.

On May 23 Pepe the Bolivian deserted, surrendered to the enemy and informed on the guerrillas, although this did not save him from death. The enraged soldiers simply killed the deserter.

On June 4 the Cuban Marcos (Major Antonio Sánchez Díaz) and the Bolivian Víctor (Casildo Condori Vargas) died in an exchange of gunfire with the enemy. In the middle of July Joaquín lost another man, the Bolivian Serapio, whose true name remains unknown to this day.

A month later, during another clash with the enemy Eusebio and Chingolo deserted and went straight to the government troops. Both traitors told everything they knew: the whereabouts of the secret caches and details on the condition of Joaquín's men who were at the limits of their strength, wasted by hunger and tormented by illness.

The troops intensified their pursuit, although they still acted slowly and indecisively, either because of the incompetence of their commanders or a fear of running into other guerrilla detachments, conceivably hiding in the area. Or perhaps it was deliberate, in the hope of pumping out more dollars from the American benefactors for the struggle against the guerrillas.

Whatever the situation, on August 9, after the troops had again picked up the trail of the guerrillas with the help of local peasants,

another engagement took place and an army bullet took the life of the 26-year-old Pedro (Antonio Fernández), a Bolivian, one of the leaders of the Communist Youth League in his country.

Now only 10 people remained in Joaquín's group, including himself and Tania. They were completely isolated, surrounded on all sides, and without food or medicine. But there was no mention of surrender. They still hoped to join with Che.

On August 30 Joaquín's group arrived at the Rio Grande, at the site of the hut of a peasant named Honorato Rojas, whom Che had encountered during the training march and whom already at that time he called "potentially dangerous".

Nevertheless, coming to know him better the guerrillas began to rely on his help. Rojas was burdened with a large family of eight children. He lived in destitution like most peasants in the zone. In 1963 Rojas had killed the bull belonging to a local landlord in order to feed his children, and served six months in prison in return. So there could be no suspicions of him harbouring love for the authorities and indeed for a short time he bought provision, clothes and medicine for the guerrillas in the town of Valle Grande. In June 1967 he and 40 other peasants were arrested and led off to Valle Grande. The special command set up for fighting the guerrillas interrogated and tortured the incarcerated men. Rojas was the subject of special attention: he was beaten with clubs and given electric shocks. But this time Rojas held up and didn't utter a single word of information. He was freed but kept under close surveillance. In fact the army set up a military outpost and even built barracks near his hut. Somewhat later the police again arrested Rojas. This time he was taken to Santa Cruz, where he was interrogated by Irving Ross, a seasoned CIA agent. Ross did not torture the peasant: instead he made him an offer: "Help us capture the guerrillas and you'll get three thousand dollars, and what's more, we'll send you and your family to the United States, give you some land, and you'll live like a rich man there." Rojas, like Eutimio Guerra in the Sierra Maestra years before, withstood the torture, but succumbed to the temptation of becoming rich and agreed to cooperate with Ross. Now all they had to do was wait until the guerrillas established contact with the traitor. To facilitate the task the army removed its soldiers from the outpost located next to Rojas' hut.

A few hours before Joaquín and his men arrived at Rojas' hut, a medical orderly named Faustino García accompanied by a

soldier, Fidel Rea, showed up there. Why did they come to Rojas? Apparently to gain information about the guerrillas. While García was talking with Rojas the soldier went out to hunt.

It was just at this time that the guerrillas approached the hut. Seeing that the situation was awkward, García threw himself on a bunk, covered himself with rags and ordered Rojas to pass him off as a sick peon.

The guerrillas approached the hut with great caution, for they had heard the reports of Rea's gun and feared stumbling across soldiers. But discovering nothing suspicious around the hut they decided to take the chance and enter the building.

Rojas greeted the guerrillas like long-awaited guests. He promised to procure foodstuffs for them and find a suitable ford of the Rio Grande. He stated with conviction that the guerrillas could find a good hiding place on the other side of the river.

Leaving Rojas some money and agreeing to come the next day for the provisions, the guerrillas left.

Hardly had they disappeared when Rojas sent his eight-year-old son to inform the soldiers about the presence of the guerrillas in the zone and with the request to pass on the information to the nearest army unit in the village of La Loja, some 13 kilometres from Rojas' hut.

Upon receiving the news Captain Mario Vargas hastily led his unit in the direction of the hut, picking up a guide along the way, a local peasant named José Cardona Toledo.

At dawn on August 31 Vargas' unit reached the hut. By this time Rojas, although he had obtained the supplies for the guerrillas, either decided not to participate in the ambush or simply took fright. In any case, when Vargas showed up he was about to leave the hut with all his family. Vargas ordered him to wait for the guerrillas and take them to the river crossing, one and a half kilometres from the hut, where the soldiers were lying in ambush.

At roughly 5 p.m. of the same day Joaquín and his men arrived at Rojas' place, where the latter again played the role of the gracious host, fed them, gave them supplies, and led them to the predetermined spot known as the Yeso Crossing. The guerrillas began to cross the river. The first to enter the water was Braulio, Tania was next to last, and Joaquín brought up the rear.



When all were in the water and holding their weapons high over their heads, Vargas and his men opened drum-fire from both banks. Braulio, though wounded, returned the fire and managed to kill one soldier before he was cut down. Six of his comrades, including Tania and Moisés Guevara, died heroically in the muddy waters of the Rio Grande, each with seven or eight bullets in the body. El Negro (the Peruvian doctor Restituto José Cabrera) managed to hide in the underbrush. A few days later he was caught by soldiers and beaten to death with gun butts. Only two were captured alive: Paco (one of the Bolivians who had been excluded from the ranks), who had three bullet wounds, and the doctor Ernesto (Freddy Maimura) who tried to give the former aid.

The soldiers fell upon the prisoners like beasts: they beat them severely and demanded that they reveal Che's whereabouts. Freddy Maimura bore himself with great dignity and refused to give evidence even when his left shoulder was shattered by a bullet. The infuriated soldiers finished him off with two bullets in the spine. So only Paco remained alive. He told everything he knew and his life was spared. Subsequently Paco was released, and remained the only survivor of Joaquín's unit.

After the battle the soldiers began to fish the corpses out of the water, then sent them off to Valle Grande where they were buried in a common grave.

Tania's body was found a week later three kilometres from the site of battle. President Barrientos himself flew by helicopter to the place where the body was found. Tania was tied to the helicopter and carried off to Valle Grande. To this day her place of burial remains a mystery.

Honorato Rojas the traitor, of course, did not receive the promised three thousand dollars nor was he sent to the United States. Barrientos granted him a small farm near Santa Cruz, where he resettled with his family. In 1969 a bullet was put in his head by an unknown person. Captain Vargas, although he was promoted to the rank of major for his part in the slaughter at the Yeso Crossing, soon went insane....

A number of contradictory versions existed about the events surrounding the extermination of Joaquín's unit. The story was set straight only in 1971 by a correspondent for *Prensa Latina* in Bolivia who met with Paco and the guide José Cardona Toledo and managed to see Braulio's diary which after his death had

fallen into the hands of the guide. The results of this investigation were published in the journal *Cuba Internacional* in September 1971.

The correspondent asked Cardona, a poor peasant with five children, why he had served as a guide for Captain Vargas.

"I was hoping for their gratitude," he replied. "But I only got 200 pesos from General Barrientos. He invited me to La Paz and promised to grant me a farm. I went there and spent a month in the capital, wasting 700 pesos, but never saw the President and returned empty-handed."

"Did you know what the guerrillas were fighting for?"

"The military told us that the guerrillas wanted communism, and that under communism, as they explained to us, everyone is turned into a servant of the state, everyone has to dress in the same clothing, and the family is destroyed. We were told that the guerrillas raped women, engaged in robbery, and killed everyone who didn't serve them. And mainly—that they had come to turn us into slaves. You know I love freedom...."

The most amazing thing about the entire drama was the fact that on the day after the slaughter of Joaquín's unit—in the evening of September 1—Che and his men arrived at Rojas' hut. It was empty, and the guerrillas discovered nothing suspicious on or about the premises. Finding food in Rojas' home the guerrillas prepared themselves a simple meal, ate and moved on. If Che had appeared on the spot a day sooner it is conceivable that the history of Joaquín and his unit would have been quite different....

On the following day Che and his men met peasants in the area, but none of them said a word about the fate of Joaquín's group or about Rojas' part in the events.

Che, listening to Voice of America, learned that the Bolivian military authorities had reported the crushing of a unit of ten men under the Cuban Joaquín in the vicinity of Camiri. However, he did not consider this report worthy of trust. It took Che a long time to reconcile himself to the thought that the entire group could have been wiped out, and it was only at the very close of September, when the Bolivian radio stations carried all the details of their deaths, including that of Tania, that he admitted the truth, although he still professed the hope that "not all perished and somewhere a small group of partisans is wandering about, having survived and avoiding an encounter with the army. Perhaps the report that all died is a lie, or at least an exaggeration..."

\* \* \*

Judging by Che's August entries in his diary he felt utterly bad: overcome by asthma and constant stomach disorders. But the hot meal in Rojas' home helped restore his strength and energy. On September 1 he wrote: "The Doctor hasn't recovered, but I have and I'm doing just fine when I ride a mule."

In contrast to August, in September he complained to his diary of the state of his health only three times.

In September Che's unit moved through a more settled zone where they often stumbled across peasant huts and tilled fields. This gave them the opportunity of improving their diet and slaking their thirst. However, contact with the peasants was highly dangerous, for far from helping the guerrillas, they actually cooperated with the army. Che entertained no illusions on this score. In his analysis for September he notes with characteristic candour and frankness that "the peasant mass is not giving us any help and some of them turn traitors".

But while Che seemed to gain a second wind in September and stopped complaining of his health, his companions were falling out of rank one after another. Nine months of inhuman efforts have drained them morally as well as physically. No, they hadn't lost faith in the final goal; they were still prepared to fight with weapon in hand, but now they felt an overwhelming need to rest, catch up on sleep and restore a balanced diet. On September 12 Che wrote that Antonio was acting like a madman.... He had refused to carry out an order by Chapaco. On September 13 Che proposed to Darío, who was showing signs of nervous disorders, that he leave the unit. On September 16 a major quarrel erupted between Antonio and Chapaco. Eustaquio accused Nato of eating much more than his share, and Julio accused the sick Doctor of feigning illness. On September 18 Benigno didn't carry out an order. Che berated him and Benigno broke into sobs. Che suspected that Willy (the Bolivian Simón Cuba) would try to vanish during their clash with the army.

Still Che wrote in his monthly summary that the "morale of the majority of those remaining is quite high". Certainly he loved these courageous men who were ready to fight for their great ideals of liberation to the last drop of their own blood ... this Benigno, Pablito, Antonio.... At this time there were several birth-days and Che consented to boil up some rice.

To give his men at least some possibility of resting and to find provisions Che was forced to take risks and enter settlements. The peasants met the guerrillas with distrust, fear and hostility. Many even refused to sell them food. The guerrillas tried to engage them in political discussions, but to no avail.

On September 22 the guerrillas entered the settlement of Alto Seco, made up of 50 miserable huts housing the peasant population of Quechua Indians. The insurgents organised a meeting in the school. Inti was the first to speak to the silent peasants who listened guardedly but attentively first to him and then to Che. Inti spoke of the heavy lot of the Indians, of exploitation by landlords and of venal bureaucrats. He explained that the guerrillas were struggling for a better life for the peasants. Che reminded his listeners of the abysmal poverty in which they were sunk. "You will see that after our visit the authorities will take an interest in you for the first time. They will promise to build a hospital or something of the sort. But this promise will stem solely from the fact that we are operating in the area, and if it is fulfilled you will have at least an indirect taste of the benefit that our guerrilla movement brought you." This was Che's last public appearance.

On September 26 the unit occupied the village of Higuera, located at an altitude of 2,280 metres. When leaving the village they walked straight into an ambush. The ensuing brief battle was almost catastrophic for them. Three—Coco, Miguel and Julio—were killed, Benigno wounded, Pablito hurt his leg, the Bolivians Camba and León deserted and gave themselves up. The remainder barely escaped through flight.

The entire surrounding zone was under the firm control of the army. Movement of troops was observed on all roads. Now there could be no thought of entering settlements, for they had turned into traps.

On September 28 Che wrote: "A nightmarish day. On several occasions we even thought it was our last day." Soldiers were everywhere. The slightest clash could mean the end for the guerrillas. The military reports given over the radio said that Che was surrounded and that the liquidation of his unit was expected in the near future.

On September 30 Che remarked in his monthly summary:

"This month resembled the previous one, but now the army is clearly demonstrating a good deal of effectiveness in its operations....

“The most pressing task is to leave and find a more favourable zone. Apart from that, we must set up contacts even though our entire apparatus in La Paz has been destroyed and we have been dealt heavy blows there as well.”

The first day of October passed peacefully. In the morning the guerrillas made it to a sparse wood where they set up camp, placing guard posts at the approaches. Below there was a ravine in which soldiers moved about. Peasant huts could be seen in the vicinity, and they too were occupied by soldiers. It was only late at night that the guerrillas obtained water and could have a meal. On the next day the soldiers disappeared somewhere and the guerrillas descended into the ravine hoping to spend the night there, then decided to return but lost the way and spent the entire night without sleep, only compounding their hunger and thirst.

On October 3 the guerrillas managed to obtain water and have a meal. After cooking a supply for the trail they again set out on the move. The radio broadcast that Camba and León had been taken prisoner. Che wrote in his diary: “They both gave a wealth of information about Fernando [Che’s last pseudonym] and his illness and everything else, not to mention the fact that they also gave information which wasn’t made public.”

During the next three days the guerrillas continued to move from one ravine to another, avoiding contact with the peasants or with the military patrols which they occasionally caught sight of. The men suffered from thirst. Benigno’s wound was infected and the Doctor continued to complain of serious back pains. On October 7 the guerrillas entered a hollow called the Quebrada de Yuro.<sup>1</sup> This was, more accurately speaking, two hollows, one called Yuro and the other San Antonio, while the passage between them was named Filo. On that day Che wrote in his diary:

“The day marking the eleventh month since our arrival at Ñancahuasu passed without complication, in fact almost idyllically. Everything was quiet until 12 : 30 when an old peasant woman watching over her goats appeared in the hollow where we

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the place names connected with Che’s Bolivian episode are given a variety of spellings on maps and in books. For example Ñancahuasu is also known as Nancahuasu (the former is given in Che’s diary, but the latter is more correct), Higuera as Higueras, Yuro as Churo, etc.

had set up camp. We had no choice but to detain her. She didn't have anything coherent to say about the soldiers and answered all our questions with the plea that she knew nothing and hadn't been in the area for a long time. She could only tell us about the roads. From what she said it was clear that we are roughly 1 league from Higuera and Jagüey and 2 from Pucara. At 5 : 30 p. m. Inti, Aniceto and Pablito set off for the old woman's hut to see her two daughters, one of whom was paralysed and the other almost a dwarf. We gave the old woman 50 pesos and instructed her not to say a word about us. But we had little hope that she would keep her word. The 17 of us set out in the waning light of the moon. The march was very exhausting. We left many traces as we moved through the hollow where there are potato patches, but no houses. The patches are irrigated by canals leading from the stream next to which we had earlier set up camp. At two in the morning we decided to rest, since it was senseless to continue. During night marches Chino [who suffered from extreme shortsightedness] became a real burden.

"The army broadcast a strange report that 250 soldiers are deployed in Serrano, blocking the passage of the 37 surrounded guerrillas, and that we are located between the Acero and Oro rivers. It was a rather amusing news report."

At this notation, written between 2 and 4 a. m. on October 8, Che's *Bolivian Diary* is cut off.

We know of the events of Sunday, October 8, through the testimony of Inti, Pombo, Benigno and Urbano. At 4 a. m. the 17 men of Che's unit set out again after a two-hour rest.

Suddenly the advance men noticed a light. It seemed that someone was walking and lighting his way with a flashlight. They began to watch, but the light disappeared. Then the guerrillas decided that they had been seeing things and renewed their march. Subsequently it turned out that this had been a local peasant who had apparently heard the voices of the guerrillas. Noticing them the peasant immediately reported to the soldiers in the hope of winning the sizeable reward promised for information about Che's unit. The old peasant woman whom they had met the day before had informed on them earlier.

As dawn broke the guerrillas saw that the hollow was covered with low underbrush and the surrounding hills by a sparse growth of trees. They were fully exposed and Che understood that they were in a very dangerous situation. He promptly ordered some of

his men to proceed ahead in the hollow and others to scout the area to the left and right. Soon the right flank reported that the hollow was surrounded by soldiers. Their watches read 8 : 30 a.m.

Che could not tell whether the troops were aware of their presence in the hollow or if they were acting without precise information. Therefore he ordered his men to disguise themselves as best as possible and make every effort to conceal their presence, hoping that with dusk the unit could fight its way out of the encirclement.

Che deployed his men as follows: on the right flank he positioned Benigno, wounded in the shoulder, Darío and Inti; on the left, Pombo and Urbano. Che himself remained with 11 men. If they succeeded to break out, it was agreed to meet at the Pidel-pargo River.

At 1:30 p.m. Che sent Ñato and Aniceto to relieve Pombo and Urbano. When they tried to carry out the order a shot rang out and Aniceto fell dead. Ñato hit the ground near Pombo and Urbano.

The soldiers opened a deadly fire with rifles, machine guns and grenades. The shooting continued until dusk. From above it was impossible to tell what was happening in the hollow. At about seven in the evening when the shooting died down the men in the flanking positions waited a bit before descending into the hollow hoping to find Che. But they couldn't find either him or the other men. The documents and money had been removed from the back packs left on the spot. They decided that Che had retreated to the agreed-upon meeting place and set off in that direction. Along the way Inti discovered a crumpled aluminium plate, the one which Che had used, and thrown-out food, specifically spilt flour. This drew their special attention for Che would never have allowed to throw out food regardless of the circumstances. The men could easily pick up Che's footprints among those leading to the point of rendezvous, for he was the only one who wore rawhide leather moccasins. They, therefore, were still hoping to meet him. But they found nobody at the rendezvous point. Inti and the accompanying men were disturbed. They continued to follow Che's tracks, which led them to Higuera, where they made a brief halt in the underbrush not far from a rural school. They had no idea that at the time the wounded Che was in the hands of the enemy in a classroom of the school.

What in fact happened to Che and his comrades in the Yuro Hollow on October 8, 1967? Pombo, Benigno and Urbano, using the information known to them today, reconstruct events as follows. As soon as the shooting began Che divided his fighters into two groups, one of which had the sick men—the Doctor, Eustaquio and Chapaco. He sent Pablito, who was in good health, with them to make their way as quickly as possible to the Pidelpargo River. Che, Willy, Antonio, Arturo, Pacho and also Chino, who was unable to move without help, decided to cover the withdrawal of the first group. Thus in order to save the wounded Che and his comrades drew the fire upon themselves. When the shooting died down Antonio, Arturo and Pacho were dead and Che was wounded in the leg. His rifle had been shattered by an enemy bullet and his pistol had an empty chamber. They had to make all haste in withdrawing from the spot. Willy carried Che to the nearest ledge, where they concealed themselves in the scattered bushes. Chino tried to follow them but lost his glasses and began to crawl about in search of them. A short time later soldiers began to set up a grenade discharger on the ledge where Che and Willy were hiding when they heard a rustle in the bushes. When they rushed in that direction they saw Che dressing his wounded leg. They opened fire. A moment later Che and Willy were in their hands. They tied up the prisoners and despatched them to the school, which had been turned into a temporary jail. Chino was captured and soon joined them there.

But Pombo and his companions were to learn these details only much later. At the time, with the dawn on October 9 they hurried to leave the vicinity of Higuera. During the day they noticed a helicopter arrive in Higuera, then take off again and disappear in the distance. This helicopter was taking away Che's body. Of course, they had no way of knowing that at the time either.

Benigno still had a small radio receiver with him. On it the guerrillas heard of the capture and death of Che. But they refused to believe that the thing which they all dreaded had truly happened.

It was only on the following day, October 10, when all the radio stations began to broadcast a multitude of details about the events, that their doubts dissipated, and Inti and his comrades had to recognise the fact that Che was no longer alive. But the death of their leader, no matter how painful and difficult to bear,



could not shake their resolution to continue the struggle to the end....

On the same day they heard over the radio that the troops were continuing their pursuit of the ten surviving guerrillas. They concluded from this that there remained yet another group of four men, and that along with Che six others had either died or fallen prisoner.

On October 12 they heard of a clash at the source of the Mizque River in which the Cuban doctor Moro, the Bolivian Pablito (Francisco Huanca Flores), the Peruvian Eustaquio (radio-engineer Lucio Galván Hidalgo) and the Bolivian Chapaco (Jaime Arana Campero) perished. Now the six men in their group were the only survivors. But they still had weapons and an iron determination to fight to the last.

The small unit which Pombo was chosen to command broke through two rings of encirclement and on November 13 emerged in the vicinity of the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz Highway. Here another clash took place with the pursuing troops and they witnessed the death of their beloved Nato (Julio Luis Méndez), the 30-year-old Bolivian Communist and jack-of-all-trades. But now the guerrillas were operating in a zone where they had friends. Although the Bolivian Government offered a reward of 10 million pesos (some 430 thousand American dollars) for their capture, none of the peasants to whom they turned for help betrayed them. Word of the heroic Che, who had given his life for the cause of the people, had already spread throughout Bolivia and now many peasants considered it their sacred duty to help the surviving men from his legendary unit....

The news that Inti and his companions were in the vicinity of the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz Highway reached their supporters in the cities who decided to do everything in their power to save the hunted men. Cars with their friends ready to help began to cruise the highway in an attempt to establish contact with the guerrillas. Inti stumbled across one such vehicle. This was their salvation. All five were brought to Cochabamba and hidden with reliable people. In February 1968 the Cubans Pombo, Benigno and Urbano reached the western border of Bolivia and crossed over into Chile.

In Chile they were arrested but soon sent to Easter Island from where an airplane carried the three across the Pacific to Paris. A few days later they were in their native Havana.

Inti and Darío remained in Bolivia. They decided to carry on the armed struggle, true to the behest of their commander Ernesto Che Guevara. On March 9, 1969, the police surrounded the home in La Paz where Inti was hiding out. In the ensuing exchange of gunfire this intrepid companion of Che's died. On December 31 of the same year Darío (David Adriasola) went down in a hail of police gunfire.

The police agent entrusted with the liquidation of Inti's group was a certain Roberto Quintanilla, who was subsequently awarded the post of Bolivian Consul in Hamburg. But this didn't save him from his just desert. In April 1971 the police discovered the body of Quintanilla with three bullets in it.

This completes the story of the unit under Fernando, alias Ramón, alias Mongo. But the biography of Che himself does not end here.

## **On the Other Side of the Barricades**

**His last hours in the hands of the detestable enemy must have been bitter for him. But no one was better prepared than Che to cope with such a trial.**

**Fidel Castro**

**Bolivia is a civilised country,  
but....**

**General Alfredo Ovando**

René Barrientos Ortuño, the new ruler of Bolivia, was known as an experienced political intriguer who had come to power through an endless series of treacherous acts. Barrientos was born in 1919 near Cochabamba, the son of a Spanish immigrant and Indian mother. From her he picked up a good knowledge of Quechua. While still in a military aviation school the future president joined the underground revolutionary nationalistic movement and was as a result expelled from the school. He was arrested and spent time in prison in 1946 to 1949 and 1950. However, in 1952 he was once again accepted in the army air

wing and given the rank of lieutenant. When in that year a coup brought to power the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), Barrientos flew to Buenos Aires and brought back with him the leader of the Party and future President Paz Estenssoro.

The sacrifices and zeal of the young lieutenant were taken into due consideration by the new ruler of Bolivia. Barrientos was upgraded in rank and then given an even higher reward: he was sent to the USA for prolonged study. Thus, when in 1953 Che came to La Paz to witness first-hand the Bolivian revolution his future opponent was living in the state of Oklahoma, studying aviation and English. His stay in Yankeeland was of great benefit for Barrientos: there he managed to find reliable benefactors who from that time on kept him in mind. At home Barrientos continued to advance. He became a general in command of aviation. So what else did he need? The presidential mansion, of course. But to his ill fortune Estenssoro's regime turned out to be quite stable. The President remained in power throughout the four years allotted by the Constitution. For the next four years he handed over the reigns of power to his cohort Hernán Siles Zuazo. Much to the surprise of everybody, the latter also managed to stay in office for four years, after which he again deferred to Paz Estenssoro. By that time, however, this unaccustomed political stability had bored to tears all the political parties in Bolivia. Even the MNR—Estenssoro's party—split, as its left wing under the guidance of its working-class leader Juan Lechín went into opposition. Even the President's onetime faithful supporter Siles Zuazo followed other political groupings in moving against him. In order to retain his power, Estenssoro was forced to bow to the military and accept as his partner General Barrientos, the very one who, risking his life, had flown the President-to-be from Buenos Aires to the Bolivian capital and had ever since been considered his trusted man in the army. So now Barrientos was Vice-President of Bolivia. The brave general was willing to make the one step separating him from the presidency, the more so that he could count on the support of his benefactors in the USA. The latter were increasingly upset about the miners who retained the weapons which Paz Estenssoro had at one time handed over to them. They didn't consider it fun that these 20 thousand armed miners (however poor and antiquated guns they had, still these were guns!) were increasingly vocal about proclaiming their mines "Free Bolivian territory"! If they

idled in the background a bit longer Bolivia might become a second Cuba. Their best hope was for the army to save the situation by replacing the "spineless" Estenssoro with a reliable "gorilla". This was the line of reasoning in the Pentagon and State Department where the power-thirsty Barrientos was being promoted as the appropriate "gorilla". But translating these plans into action turned out to be difficult. Barrientos controlled only the air; ground forces were under General Ovando Candía who had no desire to be second fiddle to Barrientos. Ovando turned out to be an unusually stubborn and recalcitrant man. To gain his support it was necessary to agree to establish a dyarchy of him and Barrientos. So on November 4, 1964 Paz Estenssoro was overthrown and sent packing to Peru, while power passed into the hands of the "co-presidents", an event rare even in the colourful history of Bolivia. Probably it is not without reason that they say that everything not only can but does happen in that country.

As might be expected two "gorillas" were one too many, even for Bolivia. Intrigues for the foremost position continued for almost one and a half years. Barrientos asserted that there were eight attempts on his life during that spell. But he remained live and well and actually managed, at least temporarily, to push his rival Ovando into the background. Barrientos posed as a democrat, reformist and revolutionary, and welded together his own political machine, the Frente de la Revolución Boliviana. This "dynamic" (to use the adjective applied by John Gunther in his *Inside South America*) general who spoke English no less fluently than he did Quechua, clearly appealed to the Yankees. Put under pressure by Edward Fox, Chief of the CIA in Bolivia and military attaché for the US Embassy in La Paz, Ovando was forced to withdraw after receiving a sworn oath from Barrientos and Fox that the President would step down after four years. As a guarantee that he would succeed Ovando was allowed to keep the post of commander of the army.

In July 1966 Barrientos and his partner Siles Salinas, also a former figure in the MNR, were elected President and Vice-President respectively and were sworn into office in August of that year. However, the political tensions in the country did not die down as a result. The newspapers wrote openly that Ovando was "dissatisfied" and could at any moment "remove" Barrientos. And since such a possibility seemed entirely feasible to all poli-

tical observers, now a third candidate for the post of president declared his intentions. He was Colonel Marcos Vázquez Sempertegui, Chief of the General Staff of the Army. Vázquez Sempertegui forewarned that in the event of a seizure of power by Ovando he himself would try to dispose of Ovando and occupy the post to make sure it didn't remain vacant. However such a threat was not tolerated: Vázquez Sempertegui was replaced and his position filled by Juan José Torres. Ovando didn't dream that with this appointment he was digging his own grave....

While this game of cat-and-mouse was continuing among the aspirants to the position of first among "gorillas" in Bolivia, the rumours grew more and more persistent of the imminent eruption of a guerrilla movement and of the presence of Ernesto Che Guevara in the country. Barrientos, a man noted for his bluster and conceit, denied these rumours outright. On March 11, 1967 he stated to journalists in La Paz: "I don't believe in ghosts. I am convinced that Che Guevara is in the world beyond together with Camilo Cienfuegos and other martyrs of the Castro regime."

But it was precisely on this day, March 11, that Vicente Rocabado Terrazas and Pastor Barrera Quintana fled from the Calamina Ranch. As it later became clear the former was an old police spy and the latter simply a deserter anxious to become an informer. Both hoped to fetch a high price in La Paz for the information they had, and they knew its true value. For were they not truly aware of the presence of Cubans in the guerrilla unit and of the fact that Che Guevara himself was the leader of the band? To be sure, they had not encountered him face to face, but they had been shown a snapshot of him, they knew that his sobriquet was Ramón and they even knew the precise date of his arrival in Bolivia. Moreover, they had seen Debray, Bustos, Tania and Chino in the camp. In brief, they had a real "scoop". The traitors, however, did not succeed in reaching La Paz: they were detained in Valle Grande where on March 14 and 15 they were interrogated by army intelligence.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to imagine the excitement

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<sup>1</sup> The possibility is not to be excluded that the CIA gained information on Che's presence in Bolivia much earlier from its own network. In any case the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Bolivia, Antonio Argüedas, asserts that the CIA knew of it as early as February 20, 1967. Addressing a court in La Paz on January 14, 1969 Argüedas declared: "I have a well-founded suspicion that the US intelligence network knew about the preparations for a guer-

of the military at the testimony given by the traitors. They did not believe their own ears: Che, who was being searched for throughout the world, here in Bolivia, a stone's throw away! But if this wasn't merely the mouthings of two delirious miners the situation was damned serious and damned dangerous! Fear spurs the imagination. Indeed the legendary Che wouldn't stick his nose into the Bolivian thickets for nothing, he must have brought a hell of a force with him! His camp probably included not only Cubans but also Communists from all over the world! The military took fright very thoroughly.

Telegrammes were rushed from Valle Grande to Barrientos in La Paz. Among government circles the report on the presence of Che in the vicinity of the Nancahuasu River at first was treated as sheer fantasy. Still the order was given to seize the Calamina Ranch and verify the testimony of the informers.

On March 16 soldiers carried out the order and occupied Calamina where they found a number of objects confirming the existence of guerrillas in the zone. One of the soldiers left to patrol the area was killed by an unknown assailant. Was this the work of the guerrillas? Definitely. This was confirmed on the following day, March 17, by another member of the unit, one Salustio Choque Choque, who when captured turned out to be no less talkative than the earlier two informers. Fresh details were added to the picture by the peasant Vargas who spotted Marcos and following his trail brought soldiers to the guerrilla camp.

The world learned of the testimony and treachery of Rocabado, Barrera and Choque, and heard of Vargas, the guide for the punitive expedition, during the trial of Debray. It was then also that the treachery of the neighbour Algarañáz became clear. They were exposed, or more accurately referred to, by Debray, for there was little need of exposing them since they were sitting next to Debray on the dock, reminding the judge of their "services" in helping liquidate Che's unit.

At a later point we shall discuss why these traitors came under prosecution along with Debray. Now we only note that their actions led directly to the first big armed clash between guerrillas

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rilla centre in Bolivia even before our own authorities gained their first evidence of such plans. When we gained access to some CIA documents I found one report dated 34 days before the first engagement at the Nancahuasu [March 23]. This report contained information on all the movements of Dagnino Pacheco, who was the guerrillas' treasurer...." Pacheco is the Sánchez in Che's diary.

and government troops on March 23, which ended in a disgraceful defeat for the latter. They lost 6 dead and 14 captured, while 8 escaped by flight. Frightened to death they made their way to Camiri where, exaggerating the strength of the guerrillas several times their real number, they reported their misfortune to the headquarters of the Fourth Division.

A coded message was wired from Camiri to La Paz, and the contents were reported to the Chief of Staff, Major General Juan José Torres, who in turn promptly passed the news to General Alfredo Ovando, Commander of the Army, and Federico Arana, Chief of Military Intelligence. Ovando gave the news to Barrientos, and Arana to the officer on duty at the US Military Aid Service attached to the General Staff of the Bolivian Army.

The information was passed still further along when Barrientos and the American adviser reported to Douglas Henderson, the American Ambassador in Bolivia who despatched without delay a coded message to Washington. There the message was first seen by William Bowdler, President Johnson's adviser on Latin American affairs, and then by Walt Whitman Rostow, a close adviser to the President on pressing foreign issues. With the aid of the CIA and the Pentagon Rostow began to draw up proposed responses for the President's consideration.

The Pentagon, represented by General Johnson, Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Robert W. Porter, Head of the Southern Command of the US Armed Forces located in the Panama Canal Zone, insisted on immediate intervention and proposed the creation of a strike group under the code name of Regional Aid Command. Richard M. Helms, then head of the CIA, proposed that the task of liquidating Che's unit be entrusted to the intelligence service.

The decision made by Washington and the approach dictated to Barrientos, who obediently waited the orders of his boss and then faithfully executed them, can be inferred by both his subsequent actions and those of his benefactors in the White House.

Paradoxical as it may seem it is a fact that Washington and the Bolivian authorities did everything in their power to conceal from the public what became known to them in March 1967, namely, that an international guerrilla unit was operating at Nancahuasu and was headed by the famous guerrilla commander Ernesto Che Guevara.

Havana remained silent because it did not want the USA or Barrientos to know. Che also concealed his identity, posing as Ramón. When the USA and Barrientos did in fact learn what was going on, they also pretended to be in the dark about Che's whereabouts. When the Bolivian newspapers reported that Che was in charge of the guerrillas the authorities hastened to explain that Che had been confused with his namesake Moisés Guevara, the miners' leader.

How do we explain all of this strange behaviour? One would have thought that the Bolivian and American authorities would have made a big splash when they learned of the arrival of Che to head a guerrilla unit in Bolivia.

The extraordinary fact about the given situation was that although the USA had a marvellous excuse, in the news of Che's presence at the head of a guerrilla unit, to "send in the marines" to Bolivia, ruling circles in Washington declined to take such an action.

But what was the underlying cause? It must have been the pervasive fear that intervention in Bolivia could actually create the "second Vietnam" in Latin America about which Che had spoken. Moreover American marines would have been followed by troops from Argentina to the south and Brazil to the east, two countries long locked in competition for influence in Bolivia. The subsequent presence in this country of US, Argentine and Brazilian troops would be fraught with the most unpredictable consequences. A triple intervention could well provoke a wave of indignation among Bolivians, not to mention the fact that Chile and Peru would have taken an extremely negative posture towards such an action fearing that the end result would be the partition of Bolivia between Argentina and Brazil.

So in resolving to "send in the marines" Washington would have done just what Che wanted and have played into his hands. But President Johnson was up to his neck with just one Vietnam, and evinced no desire of tackling a second one. He had had his fill with one intervention in the Dominican Republic, an action which provoked a huge wave of protest in the USA as well as throughout Latin America and other continents. It would have been very risky from this angle as well to give an order sending troops into the Bolivian jungles. Johnson had no desire to rush into the matter, that much at least was certain.

Given this line of reasoning there was certainly no point in



admitting the presence of Che in Bolivia. If the opposite choice were made, ultra-right groups in the USA might pressure Johnson into sending the marines in. On the other hand, confirmation of Che's presence could accelerate the development of a revolutionary crisis in the country and lead to the overthrow of Barrientos, an alternative by no means to the liking of the White House.

The only option was to get rid of Che some other way, and preferably by using indigenous forces as had been done in Peru, Guatemala, Venezuela and Argentina. Sending in American forces and turning Bolivia if not into a "second Vietnam" at least into a second Dominican Republic was to be reserved as a trump card of the final resort.

Of course such an approach involved risks both for US ruling circles and for Barrientos personally. After all, Che might collect such forces behind him that no intervention could possibly cope with.

For the time being anyway it seemed wise to maintain calm. There appeared to be no cause for panic since Che only had a few dozen men at his disposal, although of course this was more than what Fidel had begun with ten years earlier. But then there was no reason why the "Cuban model" had to be followed: it had been stymied in Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela and Peru, where the local powers had successfully coped with the guerrilla threat without resorting to direct intervention by the US Army.

The arrest in April of Debray, Bustos and Roth served to confirm that Che had rather limited resources at his disposal, and further convinced the arbiters of Bolivia's destiny and Washington authorities of the desirability of remaining quiet about Che. Apart from that, the venal press dancing to any tune chosen by American fiddlers had already reported *ad nauseam* about Che's death—that he was killed in Cuba, in Peru, in the Congo and even in the Soviet Union. Barrientos himself had said that he didn't believe in ghosts! It would have been difficult, even frightening to resurrect Che at the head of a unit or, maybe, an army of guerrillas.

But while a taboo had been imposed on the mention of Che, it was still possible and even thought necessary to raise a commotion about Debray. This would-be revolutionary who not without conceit called himself Danton was now destined to occupy the centre of the stage for a brief interval.

With his arrest on April 20 the Bolivian authorities obtained a fitting "monster". They even issued him a special prison outfit, complete with stripes and a huge "001" sewn on the back, signifying of course "Enemy Number 1".

It was not Che, but this Frenchman or rather this "Franco-Cuban" Debray who according to Bolivian propaganda was the intellectual mentor of the guerrilla activities and the "murderer" of Bolivian soldiers. The "common folk" (police agents in civilian garb) besieged the officers' club in Camiri where Debray was being held and demanded his execution. To be sure, the death penalty had been abolished in Bolivia, but Barrientos turned to an obedient Parliament with a request for its restoration hoping to apply it retroactively in the case of Debray. The General could of course have ordered that the prisoner be despatched "while attempting to escape". But De Gaulle intervened on Debray's behalf and Barrientos was forced to take into consideration a request from the President of France. He recalled what had happened a century earlier when one of his predecessors, President Melgarejo, in a fit of anger against the English Ambassador had sent him on a donkey from La Paz to Buenos Aires: in reply Queen Victoria had ordered the name of Bolivia obliterated from all maps. Barrientos was not eager to quarrel with General De Gaulle and decided to deprive Debray of his life in a "civilised" and "legitimate" manner.

Such were at least the plans concerning Debray, against whom feverish preparations were made for a show-case trial. But since Debray turned out to be uncooperative it was decided that he should be tried together with the highly loquacious Bustos who had told everything that he knew of Che and Nancahuasu and even drawn portraits, not bad ones for an amateur, of everyone he had seen and rubbed shoulders with in the guerrilla camp. For good measure Bustos was accompanied by the police stooges Rocabado, Barrera, Choque and Algaráñez, who were ordered to play the part of "repentant" guerrillas. Added to the dock of the accused was the name of Jorge Vázquez Machicado Viaña, the very same Bigotes who had nearly fainted at the sight of Che. However, he did not figure in the trial—"due to illness". In reality he was already dead, the victim of excessive police torture. But the government was embarrassed at this death and several times during the trial the prosecutor promised to produce him for the court, of course in vain, for the Bolivian police were capable

of murder but not of resurrection. So they were forced to announce his "escape" which gave them the opportunity of sentencing the dead man *in absentia*.

But the preparations, which lasted about five months, and the trial itself of Debray could not dispose of Che. He and his unit had to be physically liquidated and Barrientos did not seem to be able to achieve this.

Until the slaughter in August when Joaquín's unit was wiped out at the Yeso Crossing, the government forces suffered an unbroken string of defeats. The impression was fostered that the guerrillas were truly invincible and had a good chance of reaching their goal, or at least overthrowing Barrientos, which would have suited many of his political opponents as well as the guerrillas themselves.

It is striking that Bolivian public opinion, with the exception of government circles, greeted rather approvingly the emergence of a guerrilla group headed by Che. This was only reinforced by the succession of victories in the early months. Here it will suffice to relate what Víctor Paz Estenssoro had to say on this account: "The guerrilla movement is a logical outgrowth of events in Bolivia. We, representatives of the MNR, are in sympathy with the insurgents...." To be sure, this sympathy was confined to verbal expressions, but they indicated that even such inveterate political manipulators as Paz Estenssoro did not exclude the possibility of victory for the guerrillas.

Even General Ovando tried to take advantage of the existence of a guerrilla movement to advance his own candidacy in the power struggle with Barrientos by arguing that the President was incapable of coping with the insurgents.

Barrientos was more intimidated by his army commander than by the guerrillas, but because of the opposition of US Ambassador Henderson could not remove him from his position.

The vociferous threats uttered by Antonio Mendieta Argüedas, the Minister of Internal Affairs, promising to wipe out the guerrillas "in the immediate future" were provoked, as we know now, not so much by his militancy as by a desire to cover up the traces of his connections with the guerrillas. So, of the three ranking figures in the government only Barrientos was trying to get rid of the guerrillas as quickly as possible. Ovando did not demonstrate notable enthusiasm in the effort, and Argüedas tried, under the

camouflage of bloodthirsty speeches, to hinder the activities of both of his colleagues.

But while until August the government could not boast of much success in prosecuting the guerrillas, matters were different with the persecution of other anti-government forces. Strikes and student demonstrations were ruthlessly and effectively suppressed. Those guilty of participation were thrown in jail, exiled, or simply killed.

On June 25 troops began an offensive against the miner-held zone of Catavi-Huanuni where a full-scale battle was fought. Eighty miners were killed and hundreds wounded. The miners were disarmed and the "free miners' zone" eliminated before it could offer any help to Che's guerrilla unit. As it turned out the miners were incapable not only of offensive action but even of successfully resisting the government forces. They virtually permitted their own self-destruction and showed no effective resistance to the punitive expedition. The collapse of the miners' republic infused Barrientos with such self-assurance that he finally allowed Luis Roque Terán, the Commander of the Fourth Division, to announce Che's presence in his district on July 5 and blow up the guerrilla forces to 400 men. On the same day he also permitted journalists to interview Debray who confirmed that Che really "had been" there. As if he was already gone!

However, the government's optimism was dealt a serious blow a few days later when the news broke of the seizure of the town of Samaipata, 350 kilometres from Camiri, by the guerrillas. The fact that the guerrillas entered Samaipata by bus and that the local garrison headed by a lieutenant colonel offered no resistance at all caused dismay in the government and among its American patrons. Ambassador Henderson, speaking in Washington to a Senate commission, declared that it would be very difficult for the Bolivian Government to deal with the guerrillas. *The New York Times* wrote that the guerrillas were gaining strength militarily and that there was good cause to question the ability of the Barrientos government to crush them.

Meanwhile anti-government demonstrations by university students continued, teachers were on strike, and rumours circulated about the emergence of guerrilla centres in other parts of the country. In August the long-awaited trial of Debray began in Camiri, but the government ambition of using this trial to consolidate its own position through inciting ultra-nationalistic passions

met with defeat. Public opinion was weighted against the government. The result was that the *mélange* of disparate political groupings supporting Barrientos and clustered in the so-called Frente de la Revolución Boliviana now came apart at the seams.

But what were the Americans doing at this time? They were more energetic than ever in their efforts to prevent the development of a revolutionary anti-imperialist movement on the continent, blatantly interfering in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. Washington continued to promote the blockade of Cuba and through the CIA made feverish preparations for physical annihilation of Fidel Castro as had been revealed at the OLAS Conference in Havana. On the other hand, the Pentagon stepped up its efforts to create an inter-American armed forces organisation—an umbrella for direct armed interventions against “recalcitrant” Latin American republics.

As far as Bolivia was directly concerned the country was flooded with American agents gathering information and closely following the development of events in the area. In Washington a Special Operations Group (SOG) was created to liquidate Che's unit. William K. Skaer, Air Force Brigadier General and Chief of Intelligence of the Southern Command in the Panama Zone, who was fluent in Spanish and had tried his hand at suppressing guerrilla movements in Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, was placed in charge of this group. Lt. Col. Redmond Weber, Commander of the Eighth Regiment of Special Forces (Rangers) deployed in the Panama Canal Zone, was appointed his deputy. Weber drew from his subversion experts a special unit of 50 men to act as a mobile training group under the command of the 38-year-old Major Ralph W. Shelton, popularly known as Pappy. Shelton had formerly been in charge of anti-guerrilla warfare schools in Laos and the Dominican Republic and was now given the job of recruiting and training a unit of 600 Bolivian rangers. He was given two months for the task. At the same time Shelton was instructed to organise intensive training of three infantry companies to combat the guerrillas. This was to be completed within a month. At the end of April these units were rushed to the Esperanza sugar plantation, located 100 kilometres to the west of Santa Cruz and now turned into a training base, where Shelton and his specialists already waited to begin the training of the future murderers of Ernesto Che Guevara.

An important role in the preparation of these units was given to intelligence work which was assigned to specially formed espionage groups. The tasks of these groups included not only recruiting agents among the local population but also the deployment of professional informers who were to pose as health inspectors, hunters, merchants, teachers, relatives of local people, tax collectors, agronomists, students and simply tourists. At the base near Santa Cruz these skills were taught by the CIA agents Captains Félix Ramos and Eduardo González (Cubans) and Captain Margarito Cruz (Puerto Rican).

Early in August the rangers trained by Shelton were deployed in the guerrilla zone of activity. Ramos, González and a consultant to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one Gabriel García (also a Cuban), posing as doctors of one or another science and provided with recommendations from Barrientos, the Chief of Military Intelligence Federico Arana and the CIA resident in Bolivia, William Kowlhen, were attached to the Fourth Division headquarters at Camiri, where they took all intelligence work under their control. They personally interrogated Debray and other prisoners suspected of connections with the guerrillas, instructed informants and engaged in other similar activities. Arnoldo Zenteno, the Chief of Intelligence of the Fourth Army Division, on July 13, 1968 stated at the court hearings on Antonio Argüedas' case: "In all the operations against the guerrillas we worked closely with Félix Ramos and Eduardo González, since we knew that they were in the service of the United States—our ally in the anti-guerrilla struggle."

Lt. Col. Andrés Selnich Schon, Commander of the Third Battalion of rangers which took part in the final battle with Che's unit, said at the same hearings: "The CIA agents located in the combat region performed important work. In particular they supplied us with snapshots of the guerrillas operating in the area and gave us a list of all their identifying marks and features, so that we knew all about them beforehand."

Moisés Vásquez, a Bolivian intelligence officer, also told the court that "all information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs was, before being passed on to the army intelligence branch, sent to the American Embassy through Captain Hugo Murray, an employee of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. He obtained this information from his agents working in the Ministry...."

Col. Roberto Quintanapilla, director of the intelligence branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, confirmed that Ramos, González and García “passed on information to their embassy, bypassing the Minister of Internal Affairs. This was above all the case in information concerning informants. They did this on their own and without keeping us in the picture.”

Still it would be naive to think that such brazen actions by CIA agents in Bolivia began only in connection with the guerrilla activities of Che’s unit. The CIA, as Antonio Argüedas admitted, had wrapped its tentacles around Bolivia as early as 1957, two years before the victory of the Cuban Revolution and ten years before the inception of guerrilla activities in Bolivia.

That battle in the Yuro Hollow on October 8, 1967 pitted Che’s men against units of rangers drilled and led by the CIA agent Shelton and by the Cuban counter-revolutionaries Ramos, González and García.

As early as September 29 the American intelligence reported from Camiri that Bolivian troops had discovered Che Guevara’s unit in a hollow 128 kilometres north-west of that city and that ranger units were being transported to that spot from Santa Cruz.

The Americans were so certain that their subordinates would succeed this time in disposing of their deadly enemy that on October 8 *The New York Times* published an article entitled “Che Guevara’s Last Stand?” sounding the horn about his imminent and unavoidable death.

On October 8 Sergeant Huanca, after seizing Che and Willy reported the news to Captain Gary Prado Salmón, the commander of the ranger unit operating in the Yuro Hollow. These were the first prisoners (Chino was seized a few hours later) and naturally Prado was eager to have a look. He immediately recognised one of the wounded as Che. “I was so amazed that I almost passed out,” Prado later admitted to journalists. He lost no time in establishing a radio connection with Colonel Zenteno (Division Commander) to pass on the coded phrase “500 *cansado*” meaning “Che has been captured”.

Immediately thereafter Che and Willy were despatched to Higuera under heavy guard. Che limped along by leaning on two soldiers, Willy had his hands tied behind his back. When they arrived in Higuera late at night they were led to the school—a small hovel with two rooms. Che was put in one room, Willy in the

other. Both now had their hands bound as a precautionary measure. A few hours later the military orderly Fernando Sanco gave a sponge bath and disinfection treatment to Che's leg wound.

With the dawn helicopters carrying the big brass began to arrive in Higuera. The first to arrive was Colonel Andrés Selnich and Intelligence Major Miguel Ayoroa. Next came Colonel Zenteno and Commander of the Army, General Ovando, as well as Rear-Admiral Ugarteche, "Doctor" González and other CIA agents. They all went to see Che and tried to talk with him.

We have no way of determining authentically what Che told his enemies during his final hours.

He also had a conversation with the schoolteacher, a 22-year-old woman named Júlia Cortéz. Che noticed that on the blackboard the phrase "Yo puedo leer" (I am able to read) had been written in Spanish with chalk.

Smiling, Che told the teacher:

"The word 'puedo' is written with an accent, and that's not correct!" Then he began to tell her about the development of education in Cuba. Even in these twilight hours he continued carrying on political education.

"Doctor" González tried to interrogate him but Che remained silent.

"What are you thinking about?" asked the agent.

"I am thinking about the immortality of the revolution."

Perhaps these were his last words.

Throughout the morning Ovando and the rest of the brass talked over the radio with Barrientos, while González and his CIA cohorts communicated with the American Embassy.

González boasted over the radiotelephone to his superior, Major Ralph W. Shelton:

"Pappy, he's in my hands."

Yes, now he was in the hands of his deadly enemies.

At noon, all except Selnich and Ayoroa left Higuera in the direction of Valle Grande. They took with them the documents from Che's knapsack, including his famous diary.

By that time Chino had already joined Willy in his schoolroom-cell.

At roughly 1:30 p. m., October 9, 1967, rangers with tommy-guns walked into the room and killed both Willy and Chino. Willy



managed to cry out before dying: "I am proud to die next to Che!"

Immediately, second lieutenant Mario Terán rushed into the other room and shot Che point-blank.

## The Immortal Cause of Revolution

**My defeat would not mean that victory is unattainable. There were many who were beaten in trying to reach the summit of Mt. Everest, but in the final result Everest was conquered.**

**Ernesto Che Guevara**

The enemies killed Che. They rushed to kill him. Why?

It is quite clear that killing a wounded and bound prisoner his enemies were not merely trying to slake an urgent thirst for revenge. A living Che—even when captured, in chains, and severely wounded—was still a serious danger for them.

It is hardly likely that Barrientos could have remained in power if subjected to the philippics of a Che in the defence box. It wouldn't have been much easier for Barrientos' American patrons. It would have been just as dangerous to keep him behind bars without trial. The entire world would have acted in his defence and as long as he was incarcerated neither the "gorillas" in La Paz and in other Latin American countries nor their "trainers" in Washington would have been able to sleep peacefully. It was only through Che's death that they could hope for the restoration of calm and self-confidence.

They killed him also because they were convinced that their hideous crime would never be discovered.

When on October 9 the still-warm body of Che was delivered to Valle Grande by helicopter and turned over to the doctors and coroner, representatives of the Bolivian armed services told journalists that Che had died from wounds suffered in the battle at the Yuro Hollow.

But the bourgeois journalists themselves helped expose the lie. First of all, even before the false version was put into circula-

tion Ovando had boasted to journalists that Che had announced when he fell prisoner: "I have been defeated." However both the doctors who performed the autopsy in Valle Grande and the journalists who were given the right to see the body and the photographs which they took, offer irrefutable evidence that Che's body had nine bullet wounds, at least two of which were fatal: one in the neck and one through the heart. It follows that if Che had received such wounds in battle he could not have made the statement attributed to him by Ovando. If he did make such a statement this of course means he was killed while in the hands of the rangers.

The journalists dug up dozens of witnesses who confirmed that Che had been delivered to Higuera wounded only in the leg, that there an interrogation was attempted, that he spoke with the schoolteacher and finally that it was Mario Terán who killed him. No one doubted the fact that Willy and Chino were actually shot in the room adjacent to Che's although less attention was paid to them in the press at the time.

The press started firing "indiscreet" questions at the Bolivian authorities, who could give no well-tailored version. With each "explanation" and "refutation" their story became more and more confused, exposing the killers of Che.

Of course the main responsibility for the murder of Che, among Bolivians that is, was attributed to President Barrientos, who felt it necessary to refute the accusations levelled at him and told a *Washington Post* correspondent that the soldiers who had captured Che had not turned to La Paz for instructions and received no order to kill him. There was no need for such an order. According to Barrientos, the army units already had their instructions to take no prisoners, for, as he explained, guerrillas had often promised to surrender and then opened fire on approaching troops. He personally would have preferred to have Che as a prisoner so as to destroy the myth of Guevara. I would have considered, he said, any offer to turn him over alive to Fidel Castro for a price of, say, 20 million dollars.

This cowardly and shameful statement was a complete lie.

When it became evident that it would be more and more difficult to conceal from the world the truth of Che's murder, the Bolivian authorities concealed Che's body.

On October 10 Che's body disappeared from Valle Grande. According to statements by Barrientos and Ovando it had been

buried in Bolivia in a spot known only to them. According to other statements they themselves made Che's body was cremated and the ashes buried. There were also rumours that the body had been turned over to the CIA which had whisked it away to the American zone in the Panama Canal.<sup>1</sup>

One fact was established beyond doubt: before doing away with Che's body his murderers had a death mask made and cut off his hands at the wrist, preserving them in alcohol. They did this because they wanted positive proof that their victim was indeed Che. They were afraid that the people would not believe that they could kill a hero such as Che.

But their fears were in vain. There could be no doubt that Che was truly dead. One of the first people outside of Bolivia to admit the fact was Fidel Castro himself.

From October 10 on the Cuban press began to publish a steady stream of information about the tragic course of events in Bolivia, including various details and versions of the death of Che. Although the evidence was published without accompanying comment, the Cuban people understood where it all pointed.

On October 15 Fidel Castro confirmed the fact in a speech over radio and television. The leader of the Cuban Revolution gave details of the circumstances surrounding Che's death and denounced his murderers, who were feverishly trying to cover all traces of their crime. In conclusion Fidel Castro read a resolution of the Council of Ministers of Cuba, noting Che's services to the people of Cuba and of all Latin America in the struggle for liberation from the yoke of imperialism. A thirty-day period of mourning was announced and October 8 was declared the "Day of the Heroic Guerrilla". A commission was formed to take charge of memorial services and measures to perpetuate Che's memory. Juan Almeida was placed at the head of the commission.

At 8 in the evening of October 18 a crowd numbering tens of thousands gathered in Havana's Revolution Square, where the people had often greeted Che, to listen silently to a speech by Fidel on the heroic fight and tragic death of the man who had

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<sup>1</sup> Fearing that the school where Che and his comrades Willy and Chino were killed would become a site of pilgrimages, Barrientos ordered the building destroyed and in its place a new and similar hovel was erected, this time called a "medical point". With Barrientos' death it was again turned into a school.

dedicated and sacrificed his life to the struggle for the freedom and happiness of the peoples of Latin America....

The dire news of Che's death shocked people in many parts of the world. Havana was flooded with an unending stream of messages of condolence from Communist parties and other progressive organisations as well as from many individuals.

On October 17, 1967, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union sent a telegramme to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba which said:

"Communists in the Soviet Union are deeply grieved by the news of the heroic death of Comrade Ernesto Che Guevara.

"Comrade Che Guevara died for the great cause of liberating peoples from oppression and exploitation. He will always remain in our memory as an intrepid revolutionary, a man of rare spiritual qualities and immeasurable dedication."

On October 18 this telegramme was published in *Pravda* with an obituary signed by General Secretary L. I. Brezhnev and other members of the Politbureau of the CC CPSU.

In Latin America Che's death caused a wave of indignation against US imperialism and its Bolivian lackeys and a profound feeling of solidarity with Che's struggle that could be compared in emotion and intensity only with the wave of solidarity which swept the continent after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

Che's death created thousands of new enemies of imperialism in Latin America and further aggravated class contradictions in these countries. It is striking that many of the bourgeois newspapers in the USA as well as in Latin America then wrote that the death of Che settled nothing, for as long as the peoples of the continent continued to live in poverty new social upheavals were inevitable and new revolutionary movements would emerge—more powerful than the one headed by Ernesto Che Guevara.

We still have some details to clear up concerning Che's period in Bolivia and relating in particular to the circumstances surrounding his death.

At the time of Che's death the trial against Debray, Bustos and other members of the guerrilla movement was continuing in Camiri. Now, however, the Bolivian authorities had no more necessity of continuing this farce. On November 17 the military court sentenced Debray and Bustos to 30 years' imprisonment.

The provocateurs also got "terms", but this did not prevent them from gaining immediate release.

Debray and Bustos remained imprisoned in Camiri until January 1971 when they were amnestied and sent to Chile. A month later Debray arrived in Cuba. The Cuban press reported that Debray would speak to journalists about his misfortunes in Bolivia, but no such press conference followed. Soon he left Cuba and returned to Europe where he published a book on his conversations with the late President Salvador Allende of Chile.

In July 1968 the sensational news circulated that Fidel Castro had announced in Havana the receipt from a well-wisher in Bolivia of a photocopy of the diary of Ernesto Che Guevara. Castro added that having ascertained its authenticity the Cuban leadership decided to publish the diary in a large edition in Cuba to be disseminated free of charge. The Cuban leadership also decided to turn over gratis to foreign publishing houses copies of the diary for its republication.

In La Paz President Barrientos tried to refute Fidel's statement. He declared that all photocopies of Che's diary were in his personal possession and that Fidel Castro was talking either of a spurious copy or of a compilation from excerpts which had been published by the Bolivian Government itself.

On July 3, 1968 Fidel spoke over Havana television and showed the public the photocopy of Che's diary as well as other documents seized by the Bolivian authorities when they captured Che. He denounced the shameful machinations of the Bolivian bureaucratic elite, which for eight months had been trying to sell the diary to foreign publishers for a price of a million dollars or more.

There could be no doubt: Che's diary and all the other documents from his knapsack which had until that time been preserved under lock and key in the safes of the President of Bolivia and the CIA in Washington were now in Havana. Now it was revolutionary Havana rather than La Paz or Washington which would make them public.

A few days later Barrientos was forced to admit that Havana was in fact in possession of authentic photocopies of Che's documents. But if this was so, who then had turned them over to Havana? Only a highly placed person could have had access, but who was it?

An answer was not long in coming. On July 19 of the same year Antonio Argüedas, the Minister of Internal Affairs and one of Barrientos' most trusted sidekicks, fled the country for Chile. Argüedas told Chilean journalists that for a number of years he had been a CIA agent and that it was he who, deciding to cut his ties with that "evil gang weaving conspiracies against mankind", had sent Che's documents to Havana.

Subsequent events would have made a good plot for a detective film. From Chile Argüedas went first to London, next to New York and then to Lima. Along the way he made numerous and often contradictory statements. In Lima Argüedas unexpectedly announced that he was returning to La Paz where he was ready to stand trial and answer for his actions.

Argüedas did return to La Paz and was arrested there. He was tried by a high military tribunal behind closed doors and for some time details of the case remained secret. It was only made known that the court did not hand down any verdict and that Argüedas himself had been released.

A year later unknown assailants tried to gun down Argüedas in broad daylight from a passing car in La Paz. Wounded, he was taken to a hospital and upon his release took refuge in the Mexican Embassy.

In September 1969 the authorities permitted him to leave Bolivia and he and his family travelled to Mexico. Somewhat later he took up permanent residence in Havana.

Soon after these events photocopies of the transcript of the secret trial against Argüedas—250 imprints—surfaced outside Bolivia and passages from it began to appear in press throughout Latin America and Europe. Then the protocol of this trial was published *in toto* in a book entitled *The CIA in Bolivia* written by the Argentine publicist Gregorio Selser. We have already referred to certain passages from the transcript. In his testimony to the court Argüedas exposed subversive activities of the CIA and its agents in Bolivia. In explanation of his own actions Argüedas told the court:

"I left the country because while fulfilling my duties as Minister of Internal Affairs I became convinced that to a large extent my country is deprived of its national sovereignty, and that the North American agencies in Bolivia are omnipotent. I was a victim of the United States Government."

Argüedas confessed that it was he who had sent Che's diary to Havana and that he had done so out of patriotic motives, with no remuneration involved. "From conversations with North American officials," Argüedas told the court, "I learned that the US Government wanted to arouse wide interest in the campaign diary of Major Ernesto Guevara, so that it could then make public its own version of the diary, having introduced substantial changes in the original. The goal was to justify a multilateral armed aggression against Cuba and mass repression within the country. In brief the idea was to make public a falsified or substantially altered version of the diary and the goal was provocation."

The documents from the Argüedas trial offer much food for thought concerning the actual political profile of this maverick personality in the Bolivian drama.

"Are you a Communist?" asked the chairman of the tribunal.

"I am a Marxist-humanist," answered the accused without flinching.

"What is your opinion of Guevara?"

"He is a hero and an example for all of America."

"Tell the court, were you acquainted with Ernesto Che Guevara and the Peredo brothers and if so, what were your relations with them?"

"I did not have the honour of personally meeting Major Ernesto Guevara. I had a passing acquaintance with Major Inti Peredo. As far as Major Roberto Peredo [Coco] was concerned, I deeply respected him although we never had any political connections."

The publication in Havana of the authentic version of Che's diary ruined the CIA's plans for provocation.

But Argüedas, who displayed considerable personal courage in all these happenings walking a razor-edge all the way until he reached Havana, turned over not only the documents from Che's knapsack. Fidel Castro made this public in 1970 at a meeting in commemoration of July 26.

"I want to point out the following," Fidel said at the time.

"After the whole story with the diary Dr. Argüedas continued to struggle and tried to obtain the plaster death mask for Cuba—the one done on the day of Che's murder. Moreover, he preserved and sent the hands of Che Guevara to our country.

"Che's hands have been well preserved thanks to the efforts of Cuban specialists.

"The traditions of our nation are well known. It buries its sons, that is the custom. Every nation has its own traditions. Maceo and Martí were buried. And that is how we shall always do it. But we were faced with the question of what we were to do with Che's hands.

"This is his flesh, all that is left of him to us. We don't even know if we shall ever find his remains. But we do have his hands which have been preserved virtually intact.

"So we want to place the question before the people and find out your opinion. (Shouts: "Preserve them!")

"Preserve them? Then we want to put the suggestion to the decision of the people: a copy has already been made of the mask and we can make a number of such reproduction while preserving the original. We can also preserve Che's hands in a glass urn and place the urn here next to the statue of Martí, in some hall on the anniversary of his death. These are the hands, with which he held weapons in the struggle for liberation, the hands with which he wrote and communicated his remarkable thoughts, the hands which he used to work on the sugar plantations, at the docks and on construction sites. And we could set up a museum of sorts, if you'd like, something like a temporary museum.

"Che doesn't belong to our country. He belongs to America. One fine day these hands will be placed exactly where the peoples of America wish. For the time being our people will preserve them and take care of them....

"Whatever the case, we shall always be very grateful to Dr. Argüedas for what he has done.

"They killed Che but they could not prevent his diary from reaching Cuba. They tried to make his body disappear, but they could not prevent his hands from reaching Cuba. We don't know why they decided to make this death mask, but nobody could prevent it from falling into the hands of the Cuban people.

"The just ideas and cause Che stood for, his worth and greatness brought about what seemed impossible. A man who officially was a member of the Bolivian Government fighting against Che risked his own life more than once to save Che's diary and send it to Cuba, and then to save his hands and the death mask and also send them here.

"That's what I have to say to you."



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When one considers the events which followed the death of Ernesto Che Guevara in Latin America the advice given by Tad Szulc—already known to the reader as the author of *Winds of Revolution*—springs back to mind. Szulc urged his colleagues not to follow the rules of logic or reason in their analysis of the continent. He placed the greatest stricture on trying to predict future events, for the result could only make the analyst look like a fool: the scene is too crowded with actors and the drama moves too fast, impelled by both visible and invisible springs of enormous force.

Certainly, at the time of Che's death even the most experienced observer of the Latin American political scene would have had extreme difficulty predicting what actually was to happen next. In fact events developed as follows:

During the early morning hours of October 3, 1968 power in Peru passed to the hands of the high army command, which formed a military government headed by General Juan Velasco Alvarado. Progressives greeted the news of the military coup with mixed emotions, but soon the new military authorities demonstrated in action that they were by no means intent on using their power to defend the interests of the landlords and foreign monopolies. On the contrary, the government of Velasco Alvarado soon nationalised the holdings of the American International Petroleum Company in Peru, carried through a radical agrarian reform and established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

In Chile two years later the Popular Unity bloc which united all progressive revolutionary forces in the country, emerged victorious in the presidential elections, and Salvador Allende was inaugurated to the post. It was the first time that revolutionary forces had come to power through democratic elections in Latin America. Enraged by this bloodless victory reactionary forces tried to provoke civil war through the assassination of Minister of War General Schneider, as well as through other activities, but their attempts met with failure. The Allende Government, relying on the unity of revolutionary forces and the support of the working people, consolidated its positions and moved to implement its plans for change: it nationalised the country's chief source of wealth—copper; stepped up the pace of agrarian

reform and began to conduct an independent foreign policy restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba and other socialist countries.

Events in Peru and Chile were not without echo in Argentina. There the government under General Lanusse resisted Pentagon pressure and came out in favour of cooperation with Peru and Chile on the basis of mutual non-interference and respect of sovereignty. In 1973, General Perón was elected President and promised to introduce social reforms and curb foreign capital. Argentina restored diplomatic relations with Cuba. Following Perón's death the situation in the country became intensely complicated, and the Perónist movement, many-faceted and contradictory in its social composition, entered a period of acute internal struggle for power.

Bolivia was also experiencing some remarkable turbulence. On April 27, 1969 President Barrientos was killed in a helicopter crash.<sup>1</sup> He was replaced by Vice-President Siles Salinas, who in turn was swept aside in a military coup five months later (September 26) placing General Alfredo Ovando Candía at the helm. But the traditional methods of ruling were no longer effective. To retain power Ovando was forced to move from words to action in the defence of national interests and show some results in this area.

Imitating the Peruvian generals he nationalised the holdings of Bolivian Gulf Oil Company, a subsidiary of the huge US Gulf Oil Corporation. He also established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and even tried to place all responsibility for the murder of Che Guevara on the late Barrientos, arguing that when Che's fate was being decided in the Bolivian Government he, Ovando, voted against killing the renowned guerrilla. More than this, he began to speak about the positive contribution of Ernesto Che Guevara to the development of the Bolivian revolution. Guevara, as Ovando said in one of his appearances, "was struggling for the same ideal of a greater Latin American homeland as we are, but with different means".

Ovando's behaviour aroused sharp displeasure on Capitol Hill

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<sup>1</sup> In 1971 the government of Juan José Torres initiated proceedings against General Alfredo Ovando for the murder of Barrientos by organising the air disaster mentioned above. However, the trial never took place since Ovando, then living in Spain, refused to return to Bolivia and face the court.

in Washington. In a confidential government report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Ovando was called an "opportunist without ideology or political convictions". This report became known to the Bolivian Government which through its Minister of Information Alberto Bailey Gutiérrez accused the despised Yankees of subversive activities. Bailey said that "they accuse of communism every government which places the interests of its country above those of the major American imperialist corporations which have already robbed our countries of so much wealth and impoverished us as never before".

But Ovando's actions, although arousing dissatisfaction in Washington, did not gain him friends among the Bolivians—and above all the officer corps whose support he counted on.

The American espionage network in the army, and notably the officers who had taken part in the punitive expeditions against the guerrillas, now regarded Ovando as little short of a traitor, while patriotic-minded officers continued to see him, the former henchman of Barrientos, as an odious figure whose hands were smeared with Che's blood.

Deprived of all support, Ovando was overthrown on October 6, 1970. Confusion reigned briefly in the country. Six military figures simultaneously declared themselves President of Bolivia. The situation ended with the confirmation of General Juan José Torres, Chief of the General Staff under Barrientos, as President.

Torres put forward a progressive programme for social change and he was given the support of the miners and peasants. He restored democratic freedoms and released political prisoners, including Régis Debray. However, he could not defend his position in power; in August 1971 he in turn was overthrown. The fragmented democratic forces in Bolivia were in no condition to offer sustained resistance to the reactionary groupings. It is noteworthy that one Colonel Rubén Sánchez, the very officer who on April 10, 1967, had been taken prisoner by Che's guerrillas, now took courageously and resolutely the side of the people during these days of turmoil. It is possible that the episode of captivity had a positive effect on this military figure, who had become one of General Juan José Torres' closest aides.

In September 1973, the Chilean reactionaries aided by the CIA, the Pentagon and foreign monopolies managed to bring down Salvador Allende's government and established a fascist dictatorship in the country. But the reactionaries were disap-

pointed in their hope that the coup in Chile would put a brake on the revolutionary process in Latin America. Some of the Latin American countries, among them Venezuela and Colombia, restored diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba. Most of the OAS member countries rebelled against the US dictate and moved away from the anti-Cuban blockade imposed on the Western Hemisphere. A campaign to normalise relations with Cuba is developing on an ever wider scale in the USA itself.

But if we come to think of it a certain pattern and logic can be deduced from these events. The revolutionary process is expanding, and the existing contradictions between the peoples of Latin America and US imperialism are sharply intensified. Changes are taking place in the class structure of society and more and more segments of the population are joining the anti-imperialist struggle. Certain members of the ruling classes, fearing the worst, are adopting the approach of change from above while others are sidling up to revolution in the hope of slowing it down or diverting it from its path. Still others are opposing imperialism out of patriotic motivations. A number of officers and members of the clergy are propagating revolutionary change. It is becoming evident to all that revolution is inevitable and will be carried through irrespective of the wishes of its opponents.

All these currents are adding complexity to the revolutionary process and sometimes giving it unusual forms which superficially diverge from the models, formulae and notions commonly accepted. But you can't judge a book by its cover, as the saying goes. What is important is the content, here the real progress of the revolutionary movement. Today this movement is also developing in those lands where years ago those who believed in the immortal cause of revolution and its final victory were fighting an unequal battle. The blood that was shed by these revolutionaries was not given up in vain. The revolution is winning, and to no small measure because its path is being cleared and its noble, immortal ideals defended by revolutionaries such as Ernesto Che Guevara.

The advance registered by revolution in Latin America is vitally weakening the position of imperialism in the world. "As a whole the upsurge in the revolutionary movement in Latin America is of great significance for the world revolutionary process," writes B. Ponomaryov, Secretary of the CC CPSU.

“The rear lines of American imperialism, only recently supposed to be so reliable, are turning into a gigantic centre of anti-imperialist revolution. Right by the walls of the citadel of imperialism—the USA—a revolutionary movement of immense strength is growing. These advances exert, and undoubtedly will continue to exert, a strong impact on further changes in the balance of forces on a world level to the advantage of the international working class and of socialism.”<sup>1</sup>

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Che's death inspired hundreds of books and pamphlets in dozens of languages. Poems, plays, stories, novels and films have been dedicated to his life. Of course, his enemies as well as his friends and well-wishers have tried their pen at the task. The enemies, having physically murdered him, are now trying to obliterate him politically, for the revolutionary image of Che is no less dangerous for them than was the real Che in life. There is little that venal hack-writers haven't thought up to say about Che. Some make of him an isolated super-hero, a tragic figure, a revolutionary-suicide, and others dress him up as an anarchist, a Trotskyite, or a supporter of Mao Tse-tung. An example of the latter is the biography written by Daniel James.

This entire effort at falsification has been executed quite clumsily. Che could not tolerate revolutionary posing, pseudo-heroics, sectarians, petty-bourgeois dissemblers or ultras, Trotskyites and other provocateurs. No matter how strenuous their effort, they will not succeed in “appropriating” the bright image of Che, the Communist, warrior and friend of the Soviet Union which he was in reality and which he will always remain in the memories of all progressive people throughout the world.

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As I was writing the final pages of this book I thought of meeting with Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan to talk over revolutionary Cuba and its leaders whom he holds in high esteem. I was

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<sup>1</sup> B. Ponomarev, “Pressing Problems of the Theory of the World Revolutionary Process”, in *Kommunist* No. 15, October 1971, p. 62.

convinced that Mikoyan would have a lot of interesting things to say about Che Guevara whom he knew well.

On May 25, 1971, I visited Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan at his summer home outside Moscow.

We went for a stroll through a well-kept park as dusk was falling.

I related greetings from his Cuban friends—Raúl Castro, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Antonio Núñez Jiménez whom I had met during my recent visit to the island. Judging by Mikoyan's remarks he kept well informed of events in revolutionary Cuba. The people of Cuba, her leaders, the situation in the Republic, its difficulties and progress were all close to his heart. This should not come as a surprise, after all Mikoyan was the first Government and Party leader from the Soviet Union to visit revolutionary Cuba in 1960 even before the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

I asked Mikoyan to talk about his first impressions of revolutionary Cuba.

"We arrived in Havana on February 4, 1960 to attend the opening of the Soviet Exhibition of Achievements in Science, Technology and Culture. We were met at the airport by Prime Minister Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, then Director of the National Bank of Cuba, Raúl Roa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other leaders of the Cuban Revolution. Many people had gathered at the airport. The meeting was warm and cordial. I immediately felt myself among friends and people with whom I had much in common. The youth, revolutionary ardour and enthusiasm, extreme sincerity and faith in their cause evident in the leaders of the Cuban Revolution as well as the broad masses of the population were firm proof that the Cuban Revolution conformed with the hopes and expectations of the working masses.

"It was obvious, and you couldn't help noting it, that the Cuban leaders enjoyed wide authority and much love among the masses. The Cuban people had a national pride of the fact that they were the first in America—the more so right under the nose of the mightiest imperialist power—to carry out a genuine social revolution.

"During our visit to Cuba the atmosphere was heated up in both a literal and a figurative sense. The revolutionary government was carrying out important and profound social changes,

and first on the list was agrarian reform. These changes met with bitter resistance from the exploitative circles and representatives of foreign capital. Acute class conflicts spread over the country. But the overwhelming majority of working people supported the progressive policies of the revolutionary government and its aim of establishing full political and economic independence for the country. And this was a guarantee of its success in the future.”

“Did the revolutionary Cuba of 1960 remind you of the first years of Soviet power in Russia?”

“To some degree yes. All genuine social revolutions have plenty in common. They arouse the energies and enthusiasm of the working masses and greatly increase their will and determination in struggle. Revolution makes the people politically conscious, capable of self-sacrifice and heroism. Marx called social revolutions the true locomotives of history, and it is an apt phrase. At the same time every revolution has its specific features, you might say its own national colouring. The local conditions, history, traditions, psychology of the people, the degree of economic development and of dependence upon foreign capital, the level of working-class consciousness and of the influence of the vanguard of workers—these and many other conditions ensure that every revolution is in one way or another unique. At the same time all revolutions of the socialist type follow a definite pattern: they are carried out with the active participation of the working people, they socialise the means of production and the land, replace the old government apparatus which oppressed the working people with a new system operating through the working people and in their interests and bring into reality plans of socialist change.

“Lenin taught that every people will arrive at socialism through its own path, proceeding from its own experience and concrete historical conditions. Lenin said that the experience of the Great October Socialist Revolution has worldwide significance, but at the same time he warned against attempts at copying this experience mechanically. But then indeed, none of the genuinely popular revolutions copies blindly the experience of other revolutions. Each revolution develops according to the prevailing conditions and is therefore, strictly speaking, unique. This is true of the Great October Socialist Revolution, of the Cuban Revolution and of many other such events. Revolutions are like the children in a family—each child has individual features which distinguish him

from his brothers and sisters. At the same time they all have much in common, many family traits, and these latter are what makes them kin in one family.

"This comprises the strength of revolutions. If revolution were to develop in every country according to a predetermined blueprint, it would be comparatively easy for the capitalists to combat it. But history is not only wise but clever: it sometimes offers up revolution in such unique garb that it takes the exploiters some time to make out its true face and when they do it is already too late to change the course of events, for revolution has already triumphed and become an irreversible process.

"It also happens that revolution itself needs some time to determine its own identity, to choose the correct path leading to victory and socialism. It happens that in one or another area of the world revolutionary process, revolutionary practice will overtake revolutionary theory. Is this good or bad? Marx said that every step of true movement in reality is more important than dozens of programmes. The Cuban Revolution confirms these famous Marxist truths."

"Of course, you met Che. Would you tell us your recollections of these meetings? What can you say of Che as a human being, a statesman and a revolutionary?"

"Che Guevara attracted attention even simply by his external appearance. He had an athletic and even elegant figure of sorts, although he was in fact rather stocky. His face was both strong and noble. He had a winning smile. You came away from talks with him with the impression that he was a cultivated, well-read and educated person. But all these traits taken together were not what made Che such an outstanding figure. It wasn't his external appearance or his erudition which stood out most, but rather the fact that he was a revolutionary made of steel, with what I would call inflexible conviction of the rightness of his views. He was selflessly dedicated to the cause of revolution and of the liberation of the working people from oppression, poverty and the other ills of capitalism and imperialism. Che was a revolutionary through and through. His central concern, his happiness and his highest ideal was total dedication to the revolution. He had an ingrained sense of revolutionary honesty and duty, consequently difficulties and dangers only further attracted him. A fearless man, he was always ready to give up his life for his ideas. At the same time he was averse to all posing, boasting, senseless displays of bravery or



phrasemongering. His every word, gesture and action were permeated with candour, modesty and simplicity.

"You could feel that this intellectual and book-lover was no desk revolutionary or ivory-tower intellectual. He was drawn to struggle, the heat of battle, to challenges. But he was no Don Quixote drawn to battle with windmills and abstract enemies. His foe was very concrete—we know him by the name of imperialism. Che Guevara considered it a matter of revolutionary honour and duty to give combat to this foe.

"Certainly Che was a romantic, but a revolutionary romantic. We recall Lenin's words: 'It goes without saying, we cannot do without romanticism. An excess of it is better than a deficiency. We have always been in sympathy with revolutionary romantics, even when we disagreed with them.'

"I had many conversations and no few arguments with Che. He was impatient, straight-forward, uncompromising in struggle and convinced of the miraculous power of revolutionary action. For many of us it is only life's experience—and by that I mean failures as well as successes—which gives us the ability to reason soberly, it is only life which disciplines revolutionary ardour and provides the opportunity to muster the strength necessary to charge back into the fray. The experience of the Great October Socialist Revolution and of building the Soviet state indicates this, and so does the development of the international communist movement.

"Che Guevara and I talked this over. We agreed on much and held diametrically opposite views on other things. Once I even told him that his name was fitting, since in Armenian 'che' means 'no'. On hearing this he laughed heartily. It wasn't easy to dissuade Che, but the same can be said of me. It was only experience and the development of the revolutionary process itself which could bring the necessary correctives to our arguments and show who was wrong and when. But our arguments were disagreements between people who came together on fundamentals. We were both Communists and this established a mutual respect as well as ensuring a binding friendship.

"The relationship between Fidel Castro and Che Guevara produced a strong impression on me. We were often together, sometimes only the three of us, if you don't count the interpreter. Consequently, I had the opportunity of appraising their rather special friendship which was suffused with absolute mutual trust and understanding. The personalities of these two revolutionaries

diverged strongly. But the temperamental, passionate and 'involved' Fidel and the seemingly cold-blooded and calm Che got along tremendously and had high opinions of one another, perhaps even because of these divergent traits.

"I didn't see Fidel Castro after Che's death, but I met with his brother Raúl when he came to Moscow and I know well how deeply they both feel about the loss. And I share this feeling."

"Do you have any comment on Che's *Bolivian Diary*?"

"When I read it I had the feeling that it had been written with the blood of this noble revolutionary.

"It was very painful reading the concluding pages of the diary marking his final days. How laconic the style but how dramatic the events! I have deep admiration for the courage, stamina and determination to fight to the end which come through in the diary. It only shows more vividly his nature as an unyielding fighter who remained that way until the end, for he was writing of the defeat of the guerrilla unit on which he pinned great hopes. People like Che do not die leaving no trace."

Mikoyan fell silent. Evening had long ago shrouded us in darkness. We strolled in silence for a spell and then returned to his home.

He invited me inside. We talked on other subjects. I was about to leave when I noticed that one of the photographs hanging on his wall was that of Che. So young and smiling, he was standing amid cane cutters and they were holding high a banner on which it was inscribed:

*"Patria o Muerte! Venceremos!"*

## Landmarks in the Life of Ernesto Che Guevara

*1928, June 14*—born in the city of Rosario, the first-born of Ernesto Guevara Lynch and Celia de la Serna.

*1946-1953*—student in the medical school at the National University in Buenos Aires.

*1950*—crewman on an oil tanker, travels to Trinidad and British Guiana.

*1951, February to 1952, August*—travels about Latin America with Alberto Granados. They visit Chile, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, from there Che returns (by plane) to Buenos Aires via Miami, USA.

*1953*—finishes his studies at the university and receives a certificate to practice medicine.

*1953-1954*—Che makes a second journey through Latin America. He visits Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica and Salvador. In Guatemala he participates in the defence of the government of President Arbenz, and after its defeat he settles in Mexico.

*1954-1956*—in Mexico works in the Institute of Cardiology and practices as a physician.

*1955*—Che meets Fidel Castro, joins his revolutionary unit, and takes part in preparations for the *Granma* expedition.

*1956, June-August*—Che is imprisoned in Mexico City as a member of Fidel's unit. On *November 25*, he sets out on the *Granma* from the port of Tuxpan with 81 other rebels headed by Fidel Castro. The *Granma* lands in Cuba on *December 2*.

*1956-1959*—Che participates in the revolutionary war of liberation in Cuba and is twice wounded in combat.

- 1957, May 27-28—the battle of Uvero. On June 5 Che is appointed Major and placed in command of the Fourth Column.
- 1958, August 21—receives the order to relocate in the province of Las Villas at the head of the *Ciro Redondo* Eighth Column. On October 16 Che's column reaches the Escambray Mountains. In December the offensive on Santa Clara is launched. Between December 28 and 31 Che leads the battle for Santa Clara.
- 1959, January 1—the liberation of Santa Clara. On January 2 Che's column enters Havana where they occupy the Cabaña Fort. On February 9 Che is made a citizen of Cuba by Presidential decree and is granted the rights of a native-born. On June 2 Che marries Aleida March. Between June 12 and September 5 Che makes an official journey to Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Indonesia, Ceylon, Japan, Morocco, Yugoslavia and Spain. On October 7 he is appointed Chief of the Industrial Department of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA). On November 26 he is appointed Director of the National Bank of Cuba.
- 1960—on February 5 Che participates in the opening of the Soviet Exhibition of Achievements in Science, Technology and Culture and meets A. I. Mikoyan. In May Che's book *Guerrilla Warfare* is published in Havana. Between October 22 and December 9 Che visits the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, China and the Korean People's Democratic Republic at the head of an economic mission.
- 1961—on February 23 Che is appointed Minister of Industry and member of the Central Planning Council, the direction of which is soon added to his other work. On April 17 the Bay of Pigs invasion is launched. Che commands the troops at Pinar del Río. On June 2 he signs the economic agreement with the USSR. On June 24 Che meets Yuri Gagarin in Havana. In August he represents Cuba at the conference of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council at Punta del Este (Uruguay), where he denounces the imperialist nature of the US-inspired Alliance for Progress. He visits Argentina and Brazil and he conducts negotiations with presidents Frondizi and Quadros.
- 1962—on March 2 he is appointed a member of the Secretariat and Economic Commission of the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (ORI) and on March 8, a member of the National Leadership. On April 15 he speaks in Havana to a trade union congress and calls for the promotion of socialist emulation. Between August 27 and September 3 he visits Moscow at the head of a Cuban Party and Government delegation. After Moscow Che visits Czechoslovakia. During the second half of October and beginning of November he commands troops in Pinar del Río.
- 1963—in May, in connection with the transformation of the ORI into the

- United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution Che is appointed a member of its Central Committee, of the Politbureau of the CC and of the Secretariat. In *July* he travels to Algeria at the head of a government delegation to celebrate the first anniversary of the independence of the republic.
- 1964—*January 16* marks the signing of the Cuban-Soviet protocol on technical aid. Between *March 20 and April 13* he heads the Cuban delegation to a UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva. Between *April 15 and 17* Che visits France, Algeria and Czechoslovakia. Between *November 5 and 19* he heads the Cuban delegation to the Soviet Union for the celebrations of the 47th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. On *November 11* he speaks at the House of Friendship at the ceremony inaugurating the Soviet-Cuban Friendship Society. Between *December 9 and 17* Che heads the Cuban delegation to the UN General Assembly in New York. Later in the month he visits Algeria.
- 1965—between *January and March* Che travels to Mali, the Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, Ghana, Dahomey, Tanzania, Egypt, Algeria where he takes part in the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity. On *March 14* he returns to Havana. On *March 15* Che makes his last public appearance in Cuba, giving a report on his travels to the staff of the Ministry of Industry. On *April 1* he writes farewell letters to his parents, children and to Fidel Castro. On *October 3* Fidel Castro reads Che's farewell letter to the Constituent Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.
- 1966—on *February 15* Che sends a letter with a birthday greeting to his daughter Hilda. On *November 7* he arrives at the guerrilla base on the Ñancahuasu River in Bolivia.
- 1967—on *March 23* the guerrilla unit called the Army of National Liberation of Bolivia headed by Che (alias Ramón, alias Fernando) begins its military operations. On *April 17* Che's message to the Tri-Continental Organisation of Solidarity is made public. On *April 20* Debray, Bustos and Roth are arrested by the Bolivian authorities. On *July 29* the Constituent Conference of the Organisation of Latin American Solidarity is convened in Havana. On *August 31* Joaquín's unit, including Tania, is wiped out. On *October 8*, Che is wounded and captured in a battle in the Yuro Hollow. On *October 9* Che is murdered by rangers in the village of Higuera. On *October 15* Fidel Castro confirms Che's death in Bolivia.
- 1968—in *June* the first edition of Che's *Bolivian Diary* is published in Havana.

## REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design.

Please send your comments to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.



**"To the Leninist youth who, celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Soviet Union, preserve in full strength and purity the tradition of self-sacrifice and heroism of the glorious October fighters.**

**"Fraternally yours, Fidel Castro. Moscow. December 23, 1972."**

**These words were written by Fidel Castro in a copy of the first edition of *Ernesto Che Guevara* during Fidel's visit to Moscow for the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Formation of the Soviet Union.**